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INCLUDING

I. LETTERS TO AN INQUIRER ON VARIOUS DOCTRINES OF SCRIPTURE;

II. NOTES ON COLERIDGE'S CONFESSIONS OF AN INQUIRING SPIRIT;

III. THOUGHTS ON THE NATURE OF THE ATONEMENT AND OF ETERNAL JUDGMENT.

BY

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PREFACE.

This little Volume, in its object, though not in structure, is a sequel to the "Difficulties of Belief," and the "Ways of God," published some years ago. It consists of three parts, distinct from each other, and written at long intervals; but their common aim, like that of the two previous works, is to throw light on those difficulties by which some of the main doctrines of Christian revelation are often clouded and obscured in thoughtful minds.

The First Part consists of Letters to an Inquirer, written more than seven years ago. A gentleman of rank, to whom I am still personally unknown, but who had found help from some of my works, addressed to me a paper of inquiries on several topics which had caused him either perplexity or distress. Its cautious and reverent tone claimed from me a deliberate reply in several letters, which now appear, slightly revised for the press, in their

original form. They were written under the impression that their publication might be desirable for the sake of others, while passing through a similar stage of mental conflict. Some remarks in the fifth letter will explain my chief reason for the long delay of seven years. It seemed to me that thoughts there condensed into a few pages, the fruit of long and painful meditation, needed some special call of Providence to justify me in giving them to the public. On that sclemn topic it is dangerous to speak, when Scripture, on the surface at least, appears to keep silence. The fallen heart is only too prone to find excuses for deadening and abating the force of the solemn warnings of God.

This scruple, after seven years of waiting, when almost thirty years have elapsed since the vista of thought itself was opened to me, has now been overcome by still weightier motives. The subject has of late been revived, and has acquired new prominence among the theological and ecclesiastical controversies of the present day. Any contribution, in a reverent and cautious spirit, to the guidance and relief of perplexed minds, is now more seasonable than ever. The thoughts in the letter, and partly those in the supplement, by transmission or by conversation, have been given privately to various friends

or perplexed inquirers, and they contain fertile seeds of truth, not likely to remain dormant when once received. Thus the only probable result of further delay would be their first presentation to the Christian public under forms or with associations which I might esteem undesirable. I believe that the obligation of caution and reverence has been fulfilled by seven years' and even thirty years' delay. It remains for me now to fulfil the duty of a "steward of the mysteries of God," by imparting to the Church, in their simplest form, those meditations, deeply rooted in Scripture, yet found only beneath its surface, which tend to throw light on the darkest and most solemn portion of Divine revelation.

The Second Part consists of marginal comments on Coleridge's well-known little work, "The Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit." These were written soon after the first edition of the book appeared, more than twenty-five years ago. They were shown to his daughter, Mrs. S. Coleridge, when she was preparing the second edition, by a common friend. Several pages of her long supplementary note, in 1849, are an attempted reply to some of these criticisms, to which she alludes very courteously in these words:—

"I have lately perused an interesting manuscript,

commenting on the Confessions, written by a decided dissentient from the views of the author, but a fair and straightforward one, who sometimes, *I think*, mistakes the true import of those views, but never wilfully misrepresents them. This critique is written in so good a spirit, shows so much acuteness and knowledge of Scripture, and enters on the examination of my father's little work in so elaborate and legitimate a manner, that I cannot help wishing the author would revise and publish it. I have no stronger desire with regard to the letters than that they should be subjected to close and searching *honest* criticism."

The wish so courteously expressed by Mrs. Coleridge seventeen years ago, even while battling eagerly in her text for the view I have opposed, is now fulfilled long after her own decease. Very few and slight corrections have been made in these Notes, and so much of the Confessions is quoted as seems needful to explain their application and reference. The controversy has grown in importance since Coleridge's little work appeared. The cloud, like a man's hand, has almost overspread the firmament. The question of the true authority of Scripture claims more and more the careful study of every Christian, who would not drift away, in utter

uncertainty, from the old landmarks of the Christian faith. Some of the thoughts in these Notes have been introduced, either in my Lectures on Rationalism, or in "The Bible and Modern Thought." Still there may be not a few who will read them with more interest in their original form of a hand-to-hand controversy with the most celebrated, eloquent, and fascinating patron, in modern times, of the eclectic and intermittent theory of Bible inspiration. I had prepared some remarks on Mrs. Coleridge's attempted answer to some of my statements. But, on further thought, it seemed to me that her criticisms scarcely need a reply, and that the space might be more profitably employed in another way.

The Third Part consists of a double supplement, on the Nature and Efficacy of the Atonement, and on Eternal Judgment. The former topic has been treated before in chap. vii. of the "Ways of God," but briefly and imperfectly, so that the real nature of my view has been liable to be misunderstood, alike by those who have blamed and those who have approved. I trust that I have now made it much plainer than before. I believe firmly that the view here proposed is the full and faithful result of an inductive and careful study of

the word of God, and tends to remove much of the ambiguity and confusion, which still rests, in many devout minds, on this central and vital doctrine of the Christian faith.

The other Supplement, in this Third Part, unfolds more fully the view propounded in the fifth and seventh letters. The subject is the most solemn, the most humbling, and the most awakening in the whole compass of the word of God. It is one on which my own thoughts were sorely, deeply, and continuously exercised more than thirty years ago. Every attempt to throw further light on its solemn mysteries appears to me to demand, not only reverence and humility, but a caution and rigour of thought, an exclusion of all mere conjecture and fancy, like that which is required in the most exact researches of physical science. This cautious mind seems to me doubly essential in dealing with aspects of Divine truth which lie beneath the surface of Holy Scripture, and of which it cannot be affirmed that they are distinctly "read therein," but only that they "may be proved thereby." I trust that the remarks I now offer, a partial expansion of the statements in the letter, from which my own spirit has found relief and comfort for the last thirty years, will be found to satisfy these

conditions of reverent inquiry into the deep things of God. Other lines of thought, converging on the same result, might have been also unfolded, but appear to me still unsuited for general publication. But if the Church is now approaching, or has almost reached, the time when "the mystery of God shall be finished," we may expect that new unfoldings of revealed truth, and of the deep treasures in the mind of Scripture, will be given to humble and waiting hearts in these last days.

CAMBRIDGE, *Jan.* 12, 1867.

LETTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

My dear Sir,

Your letter of inquiry opens a wide range of subjects, on which you ask for help to relieve your secret perplexity. Each of them is of high importance, and may well repay a careful examination. Those which come first in order are not difficulties in Scripture itself, but only doubts with regard to statements or phrases current among religious teachers, of which you are not satisfied that they have any Scriptural warrant. It ought, however, to cause us no surprise, should partial error be found to mingle with popular expositions of Divine truth, even by good and holy men. We all, in our present state, see "through a glass, darkly," and the wisest and the best have much to learn in the deep things of God. With regard to all such human expositions our double maxim should ever be—"To the law and to the testimony"—"Prove all things, hold fast that which is good." Still, the topics themselves are of great importance, and our view of them must influence the

whole tone of our thoughts in our review of Scripture difficulties. I will offer a few remarks on each of them, as they appear in your letter. May the Spirit of truth and wisdom preserve me from error, and make my words a help to the full establishment of your heart in the knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ our Lord.

I. Salvation, you remark first of all, is in your view too noble a boon to man to be limited within the pale of one Church, or section of a Church. You hold the Romish faith in abhorrence, for its temporal aggressiveness and its persecuting spirit. But still, to your mind, a Roman Catholic, or Nonconformist, or any person sincerely believing in Revelation, is equally likely to gain eternal life as the most orthodox member of the Anglican Church. And you seem to fear that this judgment may be censured for latitudinarian laxity by many good men whose general sentiments you would approve.

Here, in avoiding the worse and more dangerous extreme, you incur some danger of falling into the other. The key to a right judgment on this vital question will be found in three passages of the word of God, Acts x. 34, 35. Rom. ii. 11—16; iii. 1—3. It is easy to err on either side. All that is essential to salvation is practical godliness, or repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: that is, a heart that relies on the mercy of God in Christ, and desires earnestly to learn and to do His will. However imperfect the light, where those marks are found, the soul must enjoy the favour and blessing of God. And yet a pure communion and a

full creed, free from serious error, must be great and important helps to the attainment of living piety. To be "saved," and to "come to the knowledge of the truth," are in the Scripture two phrases almost convertible. But it must be much harder to lay hold upon saving truth, whenever the soul is shut in with an atmosphere of falsehood and superstition. On this point Baxter has well observed—"We may say of every error and sin, he that is saved must be saved from it, at least from the power of it on the heart, and from the guilt by forgiveness. . . . Many do hold things which by consequence subvert Christianity, and yet do hold Christianity first and faster, in heart and sincere practice, and would renounce their error if they saw the inconsistency. That which they hold first and fast and practically, doth save them from the power of their own opinions, as an antidote or strength of nature may save a man from a small quantity of poison. . . . No man will be saved for being no Papist, much less for being a Papist. And all that are truly holy, heavenly, humble lovers of God, and of those that are His servants, will be saved. How many such are among the Papists God only knoweth, who is their Judge."

A Divine antidote to all religious bigotry meets us at the opening of the Gospel, when it was first preached to the Gentiles; and proceeds, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, from the lips of that Apostle, whose name has been perverted into a plea for the worst excesses of bigotry in the Church of Rome. "Of a truth, I perceive," said St. Peter to Cornelius, "that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth

Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him." The degrees of light, we are thus taught, may vary widely; but for acceptance with God two things alone are required, a genuine fear or reverence of God in the heart, and its natural fruit, the working of righteousness, or a spirit of practical obedience to the Divine will. Thus Cornelius was accepted with God, even when his religious knowledge was small, at the time when he received the angelic vision. And still the description given him of the message the Apostle was to bring is this—"Who shall tell thee words whereby thou and thy house shall be saved." When he sought God earnestly, though in mist and twilight, with fastings, alms, and prayer, his acceptance and salvation were begun. But when the person and the work of our Lord were distinctly made known to him, and received with explicit faith, the germ became a plant, the embryo a visible birth, and salvation came to his house with a clearness and fulness of blessing unknown before. Thus the morning twilight suffices for vision, but not for clear vision, and derives all its power to dispel the darkness from the still unrisen sun.

On the other hand, when the possibility of salvation under imperfect forms of faith or profession is made a warrant for religious indifference, an opposite statement is given us in the word of God, to expose the dangerous error. When the Apostle St. Paul had laid down the same truth anew, that God is no respecter of persons, that the unrighteous Jew would be condemned, and the upright and pious Gentile be accepted and justified, he

pauses in his argument to meet an objection that might arise, as if the external profession were a matter of entire indifference. "What advantage, then, hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?" And he gives a brief and decisive answer—"Much, every way: chiefly because unto them were committed the oracles of God." It must be hard to lay hold on saving truth, when men are shut in by an atmosphere of falsehood and superstition. A pure communion, and a creed free from serious error, must be great helps to the attainment of real and living piety; but, above all, the gain is immense whenever men have free access, in their own tongue, to the written word of God.

II. Again, you think that Evangelical teachers, from their very earnestness, are prone to overstate and prove too much. Salvation is represented as almost impossible of attainment, and Almighty God as an implacable Judge. Men are repelled by a picture so appalling, and drive the subject from their minds, in the vain hope of quenching the anxiety all rational beings must feel to penetrate into the mysteries of the world beyond the grave.

There may be some Evangelical teachers, at least some who pass under the name, to whom this censure justly applies. There is a form of high Calvinism, indeed, which robs those who hold it of any Gospel or glad tidings to preach directly to every sinner. But this is the exception, perhaps the rare exception, and not the rule. In these days it is possible that an opposite charge may be more widely true, of dwelling on the freeness of Divine grace,

without any full statement, like those in the Scriptures, of the difficulties and hindrances in the way to heaven. The usual tone of the best modern teaching is hardly so startling, or so adapted to awaken caution and holy fear, as the words of the Apostle, "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" These words of our Lord himself, far more than the imperfect comments of men, are likely to repel by their seeming severity:—"Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat; because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." The usual defect of Evangelical preaching is not that the way of ruin is described as broader, or the way of life more narrow, than these words imply. It is rather that the excellency of the promised salvation, the love of the Father, the grace of the Redeemer, the power and help of the Comforter, are not set forth in all their mighty attractiveness of Divine love; so as to persuade and compel the hesitating soul to yield itself up to the gracious invitation, and to press onward, with earnest desire, towards a prize so glorious.

III. Again, you have heard preachers, in their excess of zeal, assert that we are now more favourably circumstanced than Christ's own contemporaries and disciples. How, you ask with some perplexity, can tradition be more convincing than ocular evidence?

Occasional overstatements from the lips of preachers ought never to occasion serious perplexity in a thoughtful

mind. Those who protest against the infallibility of the Bishop and the Church of Rome can never dream that every zealous clergyman or minister is infallible in his public ministrations. But in this case I believe that the statement which has startled you is strictly true, when a little reasonable explanation is given.

Tradition, it is true, is weaker in its own nature than ocular evidence. But the difference in some forms of tradition may be so slight as to be almost imperceptible, and be far outweighed by the increase of other evidence in the lapse of time. Most persons of intelligence are just as firmly convinced of the past existence of Julius Cæsar, his invasion of Britain, his victory at Pharsalia, and his death in the senate-house, as of the existence of Napoleon, his victory at Austerlitz, his defeat at Waterloo, and his death at St. Helena. Yet one series of events is almost within our own lifetime, and the other full nineteen centuries ago. Where events have a certain degree of publicity, and involve momentous consequences, the influence of time in weakening the evidence of their reality may be practically insensible. The impression will be more vivid when miracles are actually witnessed, but the conviction of their reality may be no less deep and firm when they are reported by witnesses, and confirmed by collateral proofs, which cannot deceive.

Consider, now, the immense gain on the other side. The Gospel has been confirmed by all the further evidence, derived from the predicted unbelief of the Jews, the fall of Jerusalem, the ruin of the Temple, their exile and

wide dispersion, and their long desolation of eighteen hundred years. Predictions have been since fulfilled in the wide diffusion and triumphs of the Gospel, and the extensive corruptions of the Christian faith. The secret stores of truth and wisdom in the Holy Scriptures have been unfolded, through sixty generations, by the writings of thousands of pious and holy men. Ten thousand hearts have given their testimony to the power of the Gospel, and have proved, by their own experience, its transforming and quickening energy. The whole history of almost two thousand years has confirmed the truth of the Divine record, and points onward to a time, drawing nearer and nearer daily, when the Lord Jesus, the true Messiah, owned already by the mightiest nations and empires of the earth, shall receive the heathen for His inheritance, and the utmost ends of the earth for His possession. The slight loss, in the substitution of traditional proof for present miracles, is far outweighed by the gain which the mass of new evidence supplies, and makes the obligation still more binding on ourselves than on the Jews and heathens of the first century, to own in Jesus of Nazareth the true Messiah, the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world. "Blessed are our eyes, for they see, and our ears, for they hear." Our age, it is true, has its own temptations, and the downward path of unbelief remains broad and easy, as in the days of old. But still the evidence of the Gospel is cumulative, and grows in fulness from age to age. The means of grace are dispensed in unequal measure to different lands, and the Church may have winter and

summer alternately in its moral history. But the helps which God has given us in these days, at least in our favoured country, for learning to grasp the truth of His word and the glory of the Gospel, are greater than those of the first disciples, or of any previous age. They will leave us doubly without excuse, if we turn our backs upon its light, and exchange it for the bondage of mediæval superstition, or for the cheerless speculations of men who live "without God in the world."

I remain, yours faithfully,

T. R. Birks.

LETTER II.

LIFE AND DEATH—CREDULITY AND SCEPTICISM.

My dear Sir,

Original sin is the next subject to which your letter refers, or the question, What are the effects of Adam's sin on his posterity? I have written on this subject at some length in the "Difficulties of Belief," and am glad to learn that your perplexities have been much lessened by my remarks, if not wholly removed. If the line of thought there unfolded is Scriptural and solid, as I fully believe, the chief perplexity to the conscience will disappear, however deep and various the mysteries which still cluster around the ways of God in the primitive constitution of the human race. But there are two other subjects which call for remark, before I turn to those of still higher importance, where the statements of Scripture, rather than the sayings of uninspired teachers, occasion difficulty in your mind.

IV. You ask, first, if it is right and wise to represent this world as wretched and illusive, and one from which our hearts ought to be longing hourly to be released.

In this case, where is the benefit of existence? Can a benevolent Creator have designed His creatures to be so miserable on earth, that they should be unceasingly desirous of ending their lives? Would not such a view either produce a cold scepticism, or drive us into a cloister? You think that there is a partial truth in such representations; but still you cannot reconcile what you sometimes hear from Evangelical preachers with just views of the Divine benevolence.

The tone of thought which you condemn is no characteristic of Evangelical teaching, but belongs rather to a monastic and mediæval theology. Yet, even in these days, statements may often be made by religious persons on the duty and excellence of a longing desire to die, for which the general tenour of Scripture gives no warrant. It is a serious defect in our popular theology that death has been made to occupy the place which the Bible every where assigns to the great contrast of death, the resurrection. Our hymns and popular treatises abound in this substitution, which distorts and obscures, even when it does not subvert and destroy, the whole outline of the Christian revelation. The word of God every where represents death as a great enemy to be overcome, and life as a rich boon from God, but resurrection as a boon far nobler and higher. In the histories of the Bible, there are many cases where good and holy men—Moses, David, and Hezekiah—express a strong desire to live; and one only, that of St. Paul, where a like desire to die is commended or approved. The impatience of Job and Jonah, and even of Elijah, is rather a beacon for our avoidance than

a pattern for our imitation. And what were the circumstances under which the Apostle's desire was expressed? It was at the close of a long course of zealous, active, and exhausting labours in the cause of Christ. He was now "Paul the aged," a prisoner in bonds for the Gospel, wearied deeply in spirit by the spectacle of idolatry and vice in Rome, the great sewer of heathen immorality, the stronghold of Satan's kingdom, and by the heartless selfishness of false brethren, who sought to add affliction to his bonds, and preached even Christ of envy and ill-will. It is when he is more than sixty years of age, and more than twenty-five years from his conversion, after he has fully preached the Gospel from Jerusalem round about to Illyricum, that the expression of such a desire is first heard from his lips. It is the only instance of the kind in the whole compass of the word of God. But there are hundreds of passages where the continuance of life, or recovery from the brink of the grave, is declared to be a token of the Divine favour and blessing. All the works of healing wrought by our Lord himself, the raising of the widow's son and the son of the Shunamite in the Old Testament; of the daughter of Jairus, the young man of Nain, and of Lazarus, in the Gospels; and of Æneas, Tabitha, and Eutychus, in the early church, are clear proofs that a desire to "live and declare the works of the Lord" is the rule, and a longing for death is only the rare exception, in the healthy course of Christian experience. Even in the chapter which follows the mention of his own desire to depart, St. Paul himself alludes to the recovery of Epaphroditus from a dangerous

illness as a just cause for his own joy and deep thanksgiving before God.

The neglect of pious Christians, in modern times, to draw their views direct from the word of God, and their readiness, on this subject, to content themselves with Protestant traditions, received at second hand from hymns and religious manuals, has overlaid the Church with a large amount of sickly, unreal, sentimental feeling, for which the Scriptures themselves give no warrant. The habitual confusion of the comfort vouchsafed to the dying believer with the glorious hope of the resurrection, has a powerful tendency, among religious persons of a sensitive and morbid temperament, to multiply cases of indirect and virtual suicide. A style of thought, borrowed from the early Gnostics, as if only the presence of the body hindered the spirit from soaring straightway into the highest heaven, has widely replaced and almost reversed the tone of deep humility, of silent reserve, and of patient waiting for a coming resurrection, which marks all the utterances of the Holy Spirit respecting those who are gathered to their fathers in peace; or who, in the still more cheering language of the New Testament, "die in the Lord," and "sleep in Jesus."

At the same time, it is doubtless true that ripening Christian experience, a clear view of the excellence of the perfect life to come, and yearning of the soul for nearer communion with the Lord himself, will awaken such a feeling of unrest in the mortal body of sin and death, as to produce, first of all, a willingness (2 Cor. v. 4. 8), and perhaps still later, a desire and longing (Phil. i. 23), even

before the resurrection, to be "absent from the body," and thus, in a fuller sense than on earth, "at home with the Lord." Life in itself is a precious gift, and death in itself a sore and hateful enemy. And yet, as the Red Sea and Jordan were driven backward, against their natural course, to make a pathway for the ransomed to pass over; so, in the progress of the work of redemption, the natural course of human instinct may for a time be reversed, until there is a pleasure in laying down, for Christ's sake, that outward life which has been marred and corrupted by the entrance of sin. The adversary, Death, may then be hailed as a reluctant slave, employed by the Lord himself to open a door, which admits the soul nearer to His own gracious presence.

V. You inquire next, whether it is not unwise to say that "death has no terrors to the real Christian believer." Here you refer to the frequent instances of wicked men who have no bands in their death, but meet it with unflinching hardihood; and contrast this with the admissions of some good men, that "it is an awful thing, full of perturbation."

You have good reason, I think, for your dislike and distrust of the broad and strong statements on this subject which have been too often made. The Gospel, it is true, provides the Christian with a firm hope beyond the grave, and with sure promises of help and comfort in a dying hour. The very purpose of our Lord's coming was "to deliver those who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage." We are taught to look forward to a time when the enemy shall be destroyed,

and swallowed up in an eternal victory. But still the dissolution and corruption of the body, and the unclothing of the spirit, are one main part of God's original curse and sentence upon sin. They are meant to convey a needful lesson of deep and intense humiliation. How can Christians, in the words of the Apostle, be "conformed to the death of Christ," when they speak of their dissolution in language of unmingled desire and gratulation? while their Lord "offered up prayers and supplication, with strong crying and tears, unto Him that was able to save Him from death," and was heard for His deep reverence. The character of our Lord's death, as the great propitiation for the sin of the world, makes it doubtless a contrast in some respects to that "falling asleep" which is one usual phrase, in Scripture, for the death of believers. But still the conformity to His death, of which the Apostle speaks, must surely require in the people of Christ a measure of humiliation in their experience and anticipations of death which may bear the like proportion to their promised bliss, as the agonies of our Lord to His infinite and eternal glory.

There is a phase of religious thought, too prevalent in these days even among pious men, which overlooks and slurs over the deeper lessons of the word of God. The work of salvation is described as finished and complete when hardly begun, and the duty of rejoicing in the Gospel is urged in such a way as almost to expunge the graces of godly fear and Christian reverence. Death may have ceased to be terrible to the Christian believer, but it is still most solemn. Its sting may have been

wholly taken away; but its shadow remains, and he has still to walk through the valley on which its shadow rests. The Bible has nowhere told us that sudden death is sudden glory. Such phrases have no harmony, either with the unforced instincts of humble and reverent hearts, or with the solemn record of the dying agonies of the Son of God.

VI. In the Preface to the "Difficulties of Belief" the remark occurs, that "there are some whose childlike faith is content to follow the plainer lessons of natural conscience and of Christian revelation, without being ever troubled by the deep shadows that lie around them." Is not this, you ask, credulity rather than faith? Would not such persons, if born Buddhists or Mahometans, place equal reliance on those false creeds, because they were those of their own parents and countrymen? The honest Christian seeks for proofs in support of his faith, or how hope to make converts of subtle though false reasoners?

The contrast to which I allude is not between faith and scepticism, or credulity and the love of truth, but between two opposite habits of mind, which have credulity and scepticism for their vicious extremes. I assume that, in the present creed of both classes, some things are comparatively plain and certain, and others doubtful or obscure. There is daylight, if not sunlight, in the centre of the landscape, while the horizon is shut in with clouds and darkness. And there may be found two opposite tendencies in Christians equally pious and sincere. Some instinctively confine themselves to the practical applica-

tion of the plainest truths, and are even ready to condemn, as rash presumption, any attempt to pierce through the clouds that lie in the further distance. Others, on the contrary, have a deep longing for increase of light. Every cloud in the horizon seems to them like a thick veil, obscuring the light of God's love, and hinders them from reposing, with the full assurance of peace and hope they desire to attain, on the perfect wisdom and goodness of the Almighty. One instinct is more safe, but the other is more honourable. One is content to till the soil immediately before him; the other, with peril and hazard, seeks to bring in rich pearls and treasures by crossing seas of dangerous navigation. The same contrast is found in the business of outward life. Our country might be ruined, if all, in their love of adventure, were to leave the farm and quiet homestead, and become Arctic voyagers. But it could never have attained its wealth and greatness, if the spirit of enterprise had not always led many of its sons to prefer a sea life, with all its hazards, to the quiet round of home occupations, to the work of the ploughman and the shepherd. Neither tendency is sinful in itself, but only in the excess. When the Christian is so content with the first elements of truth he has received, as to accept passively the opinions that float around him, and never to exercise his own thoughts on the deeper mysteries of creation, providence, and redemption, his religion will soon degenerate into mere formalism, his seeming faith into blind credulity. On the other hand, when young and ardent minds, with little reverence or humility, rush into the pathways of

metaphysical speculation, unconscious of the danger which besets them, alike from the narrow limit of their understanding, and the secret moral obliquity of the sinful heart, they are only too likely to lose their way, and to make shipwreck of their faith on the dark mountains of pride and unbelief.

We admire the heroism of the navigator, when, after proposing to himself some noble and worthy object, he uses all prudent foresight, provisions his vessel for the voyage, provides himself with best instruments, chart and compass, sextant, telescope, and chronometer, and faces with calmness the dangers that are unavoidable, because he is conscious that no needless risk has been incurred. But we justly condemn the rashness of him who throws away his own life and the lives of his crew, with a total neglect of due precaution, and in proud contempt of real danger, in order to gain a reputation for bold and hardy enterprise. The same contrast applies to the case before us. It is a noble enterprise to extend the boundaries of religious truth, as apprehended by ordinary Christians, and to clear away some of those clouds which obscure from their minds the full vision of the wisdom and goodness of the Most High. But the price which must be paid in such an effort is a closer conflict than other Christians may have to undergo, with questionings and difficulties, and dark and gloomy thoughts, which, like the sons of Anak, resist the entrance of the soul into the good land of promise. To embark on such a voyage, or engage in such a warfare, in a spirit of vain self-confidence, is rash and sinful, and may often

have a ruinous and fatal issue. Our minds may easily be dazzled and confounded, and our steps may slide in slippery places, when we gaze, without deepest reverence and prayer for light, on the mysteries of life and death, the fall, redemption, and eternal judgment. Those Christians may seem almost to be envied, who till their own little homestead, and never launch their bark on the wide and trackless ocean that leads to undiscovered truths. This childlike faith has a beauty of its own, but a manly faith is still more excellent and beautiful. The little children, soon or late, must rise unto the experience of the young men in Christ, who are strong and overcome the wicked one through a larger indwelling of the word of God, before they can attain the last and highest stage of the "fathers," whose hearts and minds are fully "established with grace," because they have learned to "know Him that is from the beginning."

I remain, yours faithfully,

T. R. Birks.

LETTER III.

THE HISTORY OF THE FLOOD.

My dear Sir,

The difficulties you have first mentioned arise from the sayings of good men, with which you find it hard to agree. This, however, may be due in part to their mistakes, and not wholly to any defect in your own clearness of vision. Those which remain are still more serious, because they result directly from the express statements of the word of God. I have reflected on most of them for many years, and trust that some light has been given me which may help to remove your perplexities. May the Spirit of God give us a right judgment in all things, and fulfil the promise of our Lord, by guiding us into all the truth of God.

I. The history of the Flood is your first difficulty; not, however, in its physical, but in its moral aspect. You allude especially to Gen. vi. 6: "It repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." How are we to reconcile this with God's foreknowledge, who must have foreseen this very depra-

vity? You suggest that perhaps He cut off those delinquents in mercy, to save them from further sin, and will hereafter allow them to partake in the forgiveness purchased by the blood of his Son. But you add that we have no certain ground for this hope. And even if we seek thus to reconcile the Flood with the Divine benevolence, the difficulty from the Divine omniscience is still unsolved.

Here three distinct questions arise. The first relates to the Divine immutability, the second to God's benevolence, and the third to the final state of those who perished in the Deluge.

1. Now, first, it is plain, when we compare other passages, that the statement which has caused perplexity is no mistake or careless oversight. A similar statement appears elsewhere, in close connexion with the fullest assertion of God's immutability. In 1 Sam. xv. 11. 29. 35, we read, within a few verses, that "it repented the Lord that he had made Saul king;" and still that "the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent; for he is not a man, that he should repent." The same pointed contrast appears between Exod. xxxiv. 14; Num. xiv. 34; and Num. xxiii. 19. It is written in Genesis that "God did tempt Abraham." Yet the same Apostle, who appeals to this chapter in proof of a great doctrine of the faith, assures us just before that "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." These verbal contradictions are thus introduced, of set purpose, by the Spirit of God, in order to compel a closer study and fuller apprehension of the Divine messages. Thus, in the stereoscope,

the twin pictures are purposely made discordant when viewed separately; that by their combination, when viewed together in the true light, the object they represent may stand out in clear and bold relief.

Again, if we examine the context, it is plain that an absolute repentance of the work of creation cannot be the true meaning. The promise has been already given, and solemnly recorded, that the Seed of the Woman was to bruise the head of the Serpent. Enoch has already been translated, because he walked with God. A waiting-time of 120 years has just been announced, which implies, like all other chronological prophecies, a fixed and settled scheme of Divine government. Almost in the next verse an exception to the sentence of judgment is revealed, a channel through which the work of redeeming mercy may flow on even to perpetual generations: "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." The whole context, then, demands that the words be read with some implied limitation.

The harmony between the opposite statements, in this and similar passages, is not hard to discover. When we are told that "the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent; for he is not a man, that he should repent," the reference is either to the whole counsel of God in its completeness, from eternity to eternity, or to an unconditional declaration of some part of that eternal counsel. When He is said to repent, the words refer to some special plan or course of action, having some definite object, which the sin of man may frustrate, even although this relative and partial frustration is one fore-

seen part of the scheme of Providence. In the gift of a king to the Israelites, the proper and direct object was twofold, that he might subdue their enemies, and guide them in obedience to the laws of God. The first object Saul had fulfilled for a time, but the second and higher was set aside and reversed by his self-will and disobedience. Hence it was that the reign, which began so brightly, set in clouds and storm. He who had given them "a king in his anger," after their own heart, "took him away in his wrath" (Hos. xiii. 11). The kingdom was then transferred to David, the man after God's own heart, who would fulfil all His will.

The passage before us admits of the same explanation. The direct purpose to be fulfilled in man's creation was twofold—his own happiness and his Creator's glory. Both of these objects were now frustrate for a time through the fearful abounding of wickedness. Man was made wretched, while the earth was filled with violence; and God was dishonoured by foulest blasphemies, when every imagination of man's heart was only evil, and that continually. If the world were viewed with reference to its actual state alone, apart from the issues in the far distance, the very same motives which had prompted the great work of creation must now have caused the Holy Creator to wish the work undone. We can only rise to a just and true conception of the Divine character by summing up all the various revelations of His mind and will, occasioned by the diverse characters and moral states of men, and the successive stages of the world's history. The word of God announces each of these in its turn. By

comparing Scripture with Scripture, we must learn to combine them in one stereoscopic view, which may embrace the whole landscape, and reveal to us, in clear and full outline, the harmonious perfections of the Thrice Holy, the Almighty, and the All-wise.

These words, which have occasioned your perplexity, have long been, to my own mind, a peculiar source of comfort and mental repose. Abstract statements of the Divine immutability, through the dimness of our faculties, now impaired by sin, tend rapidly to produce an immoral fatalism, deadening to the conscience, and destructive of all spiritual life. Of all temptations to which men are exposed, this is perhaps the most universal and the most dangerous. It is common to all classes, the Christian divine, the sceptic philosopher, and the unlettered peasant. What will be, will be, and cannot be altered; so that we may fold our arms, and float idly down the stream of time. The positive philosophy of our own days is based, almost throughout, on this main fallacy. The laws of progress, it affirms, are fixed and immutable. The will of the individual is itself a mere product of outward circumstances, and is powerless amidst the tide of antecedents and consequents, which moves on with perpetual flow. And thus men are always blameless, whatever the amount of their seeming crime.

The same evil was rife, in the times of the Captivity, among the ancient Jews. "If our transgressions and sins be upon us," they cried, "and we pine away in them, how should we then live?" Similar statements may often be heard on the lips of the poorest and most ignorant, to

excuse their neglect of the laws of Christian morality, and of the welfare of the immortal soul. In "Queen Mab," Shelley's beautiful but hateful poem, the same thought underlies and sustains a large superstructure of blasphemy:

> "Spirit of Nature, all-sufficing Power,
> Necessity, thou Mother of the world,
> Unlike the God of human error, thou
> Requir'st no prayers or praises . . . the slave
> Whose horrible lusts spread misery o'er the world,
> And the good man . . . are equal in Thy sight."

A cold and heartless philosophy is ever attempting to seat this gaunt and lifeless spectre, this blind Fate, under such titles as the Deity, the Absolute, the Soul of the world, in the temple of the true and living God. And the text in question is a flaming sword, placed at the very entrance of Scripture, like the cherubim at the eastern gate of Paradise, to guard it from the inroad of so fatal a delusion, and thus to "keep the way of the tree of life." The conception of sin really perishes when we cease to look upon it as grievous in the sight of God, and conceive that all events and all passions, because they exist, are alike acceptable and pleasing in His sight. It is one mark of the deep wisdom which pervades all Scripture, that so near its opening there should be found that firm and full protest against every form of immoral fatalism which this verse supplies to every thoughtful reader. Here we leave behind us all those dreary counterfeits of a cold-hearted philosophy, which usurp and profane the titles of the Most High. We learn that we have to do

henceforth with a living God, a righteous Governor of the world, who loves righteousness and hates iniquity, and whose holy eyes sift and search, with intense discrimination, all the works and ways of sinful men.

2. But a second difficulty may arise from the same narrative. How are we to reconcile a destruction so extensive and universal with just views of the Divine benevolence?

The difficulty here seems to lie in our slowness to admit the truth, that evil can be so intensely evil as to require that God himself should deal with it in this way. For if we only assume that warnings and long-suffering patience have been used to the uttermost, then even benevolence must prescribe that incorrigible transgression should be punished, rather than the Divine glory should be wholly blotted out, and mankind be given up to the triumph of evil, and total ruin. The moral of the history, if we accept its natural construction, is clear and plain. Forbearance had now been carried to its furthest limit. Only one righteous household was left. The same forbearance, if continued further, would have issued in a state of wickedness strictly universal. The seed of the righteous would have perished, the great end of creation been reversed, and the scheme of redemption have come abruptly to a dark and fatal close. It is because the judgment had been delayed so long under sorest provocation, that, when once it began, it needed to be so complete. Once for all, this Divine perfection, the long-suffering of God, needed to be carried to its furthest extent, and on the largest scale. But the costly and solemn experiment was never more

to be repeated. An earlier interference, by local and partial judgments, would hereafter prevent the growth of an apostasy so wide-spread and entire. It must be hard for creatures, sinful themselves, to attain a due sense of the stubbornness and malignity of moral evil in its more extreme and aggravated forms. But the facts which a mournful experience has revealed in later ages, and their long and dark succession of crime, should prepare us to admit the truth which is implied in these earliest pages of the word of God. There may be places and times when the infliction of severe and righteous judgment on hardened transgressors fulfils, instead of reversing, the laws of a true benevolence. A world of rebels can never be governed by sprinkling it with rose-water. There is a feeble, sickly sentimentalism, which shuts its eyes to the depth and inveteracy of moral disease in sinful hearts, and only aggravates the evils it pretends to cure. But perfect goodness must include the widest extremes of moral excellence, the unbending sternness of just severity against obdurate evil, and the tender compassion which revealed itself in the tears of our Lord at the grave of Lazarus, and over guilty Jerusalem.

3. The third question involved in your inquiry relates to the final state of those who perished in the Deluge. Were they cut off, you ask, to keep them from further sin, and will they be allowed hereafter to partake in the forgiveness purchased by the blood of Christ?

Here two questions very different need to be distinguished from each other. The first refers to the likeli-

hood of repentance when the Flood was coming on the earth; and the other, to the possibility of those who have died impenitent obtaining a second probation.

For this latter view I can see no warrant in the word of God. On the contrary, it seems to contradict and annul the natural force of its solemn and repeated warnings, like those words of the Apostle: "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation!" The whole drift of its teaching is summed up in the statement,—"It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment." The account by which the state is fixed, is of the "things done in the body, whether they be good or evil."

On the other question, however, Scripture seems to give some little light. St. Peter, in a well-known passage (1 Pet. iii. 18—20), tells us that our Lord, in His spirit, "went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water."

The application of these words to the preaching in spirit in the person of Noah does plain violence to the context and the grammatical force of the terms. Two journeys of our Lord are mentioned in succession, one after His death, the other after His resurrection; one to the spirits in prison, the other to the right hand of God and the spirits of light in God's presence, "angels, and authorities, and powers being made subject unto Him." The spirits visited are those who "sometime were dis-

obedient,"—that is, not at the time of the visit itself, but at a period implied to be much earlier, the days of Noah. The contrast in the double statement of St. Peter respecting this double journey answers to the words of St. Paul on the same subject: "Now that he ascended, what is it but that he descended first into the lower parts of the earth?" In a first journey of descent, our Lord preached to the spirits in prison; and then, by a second journey, He ascended on high, is gone into heaven, and seated at the right hand of God.

The true meaning, then, seems to be that, of those who perished in the Flood, some, and perhaps many, repented when the judgment came suddenly upon them, and all hope of outward deliverance had passed away. The ark of Noah did not and could not receive them. Its door had been shut by the hand of God. To these, we are taught, in the region of departed spirits, our Lord, after His death, announced His own finished sacrifice; that those who had repented at the last, but for whom the ark could supply no escape from the waters, might obtain a better ark of refuge in the Saviour's covenant of redeeming love.

The same view will explain the obscure verse in the next chapter: "For this cause was the Gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit." The dead here, contrasted with the living, must naturally mean those who were in the state of the dead when this message came to them. It sounds like an unexpected and mysterious extension of the Gospel message, so that

not living men alone, but the departed also, came directly within the range of its proclamation. The change was to affect their state, not in the sight of men, but of God alone. The men in the days of Noah, the dwellers in the cities of the plain, the Egyptian host, the Canaanite armies, to the eye of men were all swept away in one indiscriminate judgment. Yet in each case there may have been a secret and powerful work of repentance, by which a remnant turned to God in the hour of calamity and desolation. To all such the message of mercy might come, when our Lord, in His separate spirit, preached to the dead, to the spirits in prison; and the destined result was attained, "that they might live according to God in the spirit," or gain a firm hold on that Saviour and His finished sacrifice; on whom, as the promised Seed of the Woman, with a dim and starlight faith, they had learned to put their trust in the hour of judgment, when all their refuges of lies were swept away.

Such I believe to be the true and natural sense of this controverted passage. And if it be asked why, in this case, the antediluvians alone should be named, since the message could scarcely be limited to them alone, the answer is clear. The Spirit of God, by the Apostle, would reveal the comprehensive character of the work of Christ, by teaching us that it extends backward even to the earliest generations of mankind. He is not called the second Noah, but the Second Man, the last Adam. His work of redeeming mercy is not arrested in its backward course by the waters of the Flood, but extends to righteous Abel, to the sainted Enoch, and to all those

who were outwardly involved in the universal Deluge, but whose secret repentance was known to the eye of God alone. That great work includes all states of men, living or dead, and all ages of mankind. How grand, how solemn, this brief announcement of so wonderful a truth!

I remain, yours respectfully,

T. R. Birks.

LETTER IV.

THE CANAANITES.

My dear Sir,

II. The destruction of the Canaanites is a second subject which has caused you perplexity in the statements of Scripture, along with the kindred history of Agag and Samuel. These acts, you say, were "so totally at variance with our Blessed Saviour's injunctions in every page of the New Testament, that it does not seem enough to say a new dispensation took effect after He came on earth, and that fresh laws were then framed for mankind." This would be to liken the Omniscient and All-merciful to a fallible mortal, who, finding that one system fails, has recourse to another. This difficulty has been constantly urged by unbelievers, and has perplexed multitudes of devout and pious Christians. It has thus a powerful claim on thoughtful minds for patient and careful examination.

Your remark suggests two distinct but closely related inquiries. Do the commands in Deuteronomy and the facts in the Book of Joshua contradict the uniform

teaching of the New Testament? And next, are they a fatal objection to the Divine mission of Moses, or else to the truth of the record, because they oppose the firm, unalterable laws of true morality?

1. You seem to assume that these commands are in direct contradiction to the whole tenour of the New Testament. The same opinion is often held by those who take up with loose and hasty impressions. A closer examination will prove the reverse. The New Testament, from first to last, recognizes and confirms the Divine authority of this portion of God's word, and implies or affirms that these were commands really addressed to the Israelites by the living and almighty God, which it would have been sinful rebellion in them to disobey.

And, first, let us turn to the narrative of our Lord's temptation in the first and third Gospels. The tempter is thrice repelled by the simple words, "It is written." The written word is thus made a decisive authority in all questions of moral right and wrong. And what are the passages to which this solemn appeal is made? They are Deut. viii. 3; vi. 13; and vi. 16. In other words, they are sentences from two chapters, which include between them a most distinct and earnest command to root out and destroy the tribes of Canaan. How could our Lord more solemnly endorse the obligation of these intermediate commands, than by His threefold appeal to that very portion of God's law where these commands are given, in order to repel and defeat the most subtle onset of temptation from the great enemy of mankind?

Again, in the Sermon on the Mount our Lord appears as the Great Lawgiver, and meets the doubts that might arise in the minds of his disciples from the seeming divergence between His own teaching and the voice of the Old Testament. "Think not," He says, "that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." And thus, by the voice of our Lord himself, a rejection of the Divine authority of these very commands would consign those who practise it to an inferior place in the kingdom of God.

Again, if we consider the verses vii. 19. 23. 27 in the same discourse, or Matt. x. 15. 28; xi. 21—24; xii. 32; xiii. 40—42. 50; xviii. 7—9. 34; xxi. 44; xxii. 7; xxiii. 27—36, in the same Gospel, their severity is an exact counterpart to these commands in Deuteronomy. In the discourse of St. Stephen, and in that of St. Paul at Antioch, the destruction of the Canaanites is plainly ascribed to the command of God. The same lesson is taught by the references to the Flood, to the destruction of Sodom, and to the judgments on Pharaoh, which occur so repeatedly throughout the New Testament—Heb. xi. 7. 1 Pet. iii. 20. 2 Pet. ii. 5. Luke xvii. 27. 2 Pet. ii. 6, 7. Jude 7.

There is a partial contrast, no doubt, between the tone of the Old and the New Testament. "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." But this partial contrast, when we look below the surface,

is based upon a deep and real harmony. The grace of the Gospel is implied and even expressed (Exod. xxxiv. 4—7. Deut. iv. 31; v. 29; viii. 5; x. 18) amidst the sterner messages of the Law, and the severity of the Law mingles repeatedly with the gentle accents of the Gospel—Mark xvi. 16. John iii. 36; xii. 39, 40. Rom. ix. 22; xi. 8. 21. 2 Cor. ii. 15; v. 11. Rom. ii. 8, 9. Heb. xii. 29; x. 26, 27. The judgments which fell on the Jews for their rejection of the Saviour were scarcely less severe than those which their fathers had been charged to execute on the Amorites. The moral difficulty lies impartially against the whole course of God's moral government, as revealed in Scripture, and is by no means confined to the history in the Book of Joshua alone.

2. But it may be urged that these judgments, however consistent with each other, contradict every true conception of the Divine mercy. This objection has been often made, and often answered. A little calm reflection will show that it derives its force from a neglect of some of the clearest lessons of experience, and of the contrast between primary and secondary or dependent laws of moral obligation.

A sentence of death, duly executed upon sin, is the constant law of God's moral government of mankind. To deny it is to contradict all experience, or else involves a creed of blind fatality which is virtual atheism. The suddenness of the judgment, and the use of human agents, are here the only peculiarities. In the course of a century the very same persons would have been

cut off by a gradual work of God's judicial visitation, common to all races and ages of mankind.

Next, when the object is to make a deep moral impression, a simultaneous judgment is far more effective and awakening than one which is gradual and successive. Common observers, in one case, fail to learn any lesson whatever; while, in the other, the most careless are aroused, and see the hand of God. How different is the effect of a sudden shipwreck, where hundreds perish in a moment, or of a pestilence that sweeps off thousands in a few days, from the silent and gradual ravages of disease and death! When the object is to awaken a sense of God's anger against sin, and of certain judgment on the obstinate sinner, the suddenness of the infliction is almost essential, that the moral object may be fulfilled.

All judgments, again, which are righteous on the part of God, must claim a righteous sympathy from every creature whose vision is not blinded by sin. It is those acts only which are unjust, capricious, devoid of love and wisdom, which it is wrong to approve. Growing holiness must imply increasing sympathy with all the ways and counsels of the Holy One, and growth in goodness, a fuller and ever-growing perception of His perfect goodness. This full sympathy must imply further, whenever a Divine call is given, a willing and active co-operation. Where this offends us, the alternative is plain, that we charge God himself with cruelty or folly, or else that we are aliens in heart from that perfect Goodness which we profess to venerate and adore.

Now if once we admit the justice of the sentence on

the Canaanites, there is a weighty reason why its execution should be committed to the chosen people of God. By this means alone could the solemn lesson of God's hatred of moral evil, and of its awful consequences, be most effectually proclaimed. No method could be devised more likely to deter the Israelites from those sins, against which they were themselves commanded to execute the just vengeance of God, or to alarm and arouse the consciences of the heathen, so far as the tidings of this solemn visitation might extend.

Two objections, however, may still be urged; that the judgment, with reference to the Canaanites themselves, was too severe; and that its natural effect on the Israelites must have been to stir up every fierce, cruel, and selfish passion. But the facts, when examined, are a full answer.

And first, the Divine forbearance to these Canaanites had now lasted four hundred years, or more than ten generations. Even before the birth of Isaac the truth was proclaimed, that no judgment could be executed on the guilty race till forbearance had run its full course: "In the fourth generation they shall return hither again; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. xv. 16). And when the predicted time was arrived, and Israel had been rescued from Egypt with mighty wonders, in order to enter on the land of promise, the same act of righteousness which condemned them, for their unbelief, to sojourn in the wilderness forty years, was one of grace and forbearance to these Canaanites. A fresh space was given them for amendment and repentance, even when their pollutions and cruelties had reached

a revolting stage (Lev. xviii. 22—28. Deut. xii. 31). They could not conceive themselves to be exposed merely to the lawless passions of a cruel and hostile race. The report of the wonders in Egypt had soon reached them, and produced deep consternation, though not a true repentance (Josh. ii. 10, 11). And when, in one single instance, there was submission to the hand of God, and fear of His judgments, leading to an eager effort to avert them, that effort was crowned with success. The promise to the Gibeonites, though procured by deceit, was still to be kept inviolably; and its violation by Saul, even four hundred years later, brought on Israel a heavy judgment (2 Sam. xxi. 1—4).

Again, the whole history shows how carefully the children of Israel were shut up on every side from the indulgence of wicked passions and mere self-will, and taught to view themselves as the instruments of a Divine judgment alone. Their own convenience, or gain, or national antipathy, was allowed no weight in guiding their conduct. When the Edomites refused them a passage, they were to make a long circuit, rather than use any force to their own brethren. The charge was given them still later, "I will not give you of their land, no, not a foot breadth. Ye shall buy meat of them for money, that ye may eat; and water for money, that ye may drink." The same charge was repeated towards Moab and Ammon, whom there was still greater reason to regard as bitter enemies: "Distress not the Moabites." "Distress not the children of Ammon, nor meddle with them." And even on the first excitement of conquest

over Og and Sihon, they were to observe rigidly this Divine prohibition: "Only unto the land of the children of Ammon thou camest not, nor unto the cities in the mountains, nor unto whatsoever the Lord our God forbad us." The entire destruction of the spoil was a further provision of the same kind; and placed this solemn execution of God's judgment on iniquity in open contrast to all the selfish instincts of a merely human warfare.

There is a still deeper line of thought which might be pursued in vindication of the wisdom of these messages to Israel, however severe. A refusal to own the exceeding sinfulness of sin, its fatal obstinacy, and just demerit, is the most dangerous obstacle to all moral progress, and to that work of redemption, whereby alone the instincts of a true benevolence can be fulfilled. The salvation of a lost and fallen world rests on one foundation, the death and resurrection of the Son of God. And what is the revealed ground of this exaltation of our Lord, the one source of every blessing the sinner can hope to enjoy? The Psalmist and the Apostle give here their consenting testimony: "Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; wherefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." "I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart." One main part of that law, hid in the Saviour's heart, which strengthened Him for victory over all the powers of evil, consisted of these severe denunciations of God's anger against stubborn and malicious wickedness. Our

only true security against moral evil is not indifference, but deep abhorrence. Until we have learned how evil it is in its own nature, we shall never be earnest in seeking deliverance from its power, nor attain that moral firmness which transforms a weak, sickly, puerile benevolence into the mighty and victorious energy of redeeming love.

I remain, yours faithfully,

T. R. Birks.

LETTER V.

ON FUTURE PUNISHMENT.

My dear Sir,

III. I have now to answer your questions with regard to the most solemn of all the truths revealed in the word of God, the doctrine of Eternal Punishment.

"Nothing," you remark, and I agree with the statement, "can be more positively laid down by our Lord, than that the reward of heaven and the punishment of hell are eternal, and strange warnings of judgment to come pervade almost every page." On the other hand, a perfect love seems to imply a sincere desire for the happiness of every conscious and intelligent creature, and a perfect victory of Almighty love that this desire should not fail through the strength of evil, but be at length fulfilled. Here, then, we seem involved in a hopeless contradiction between direct and repeated statements of Scripture on the one side, and inferences, on the other, natural and almost inevitable, from one of the most fundamental truths of revealed religion. The subject is deeply solemn in its own nature, and

has caused more perplexity than any other, in every age of the Church, to thoughtful Christians. My own mind has been more than usually exercised upon it many years ago. I cannot hope to give your perplexity full and entire relief. Yet some light has arisen to me out of the darkness and sorrow of years of early meditation; and though I have shrunk so long, for a special reason, from publishing my thoughts, yours is precisely such a case as seems to make it my duty to explain the conclusion to which I have long ago been led, and the direction in which my spirit has found relief, without daring, by unauthorized guess-work, to tamper with the entire truthfulness of the solemn messages of God.

1. First of all, every created being may be viewed in two different aspects, internal and external; what it is in itself, and also as part of a greater whole. It has a personal and individual, but also a relative or federal character. This double warp and woof runs through the whole of Scripture, and occasions a frequent antithesis in its statements of Divine truth. Thus we are told that "in Adam all die," and still "the soul that sinneth, it shall die;" that "in Christ shall all be made alive," and also that eternal life shall be the result of personal work, "patient continuance in well doing" (Rom. ii. 7). The charge to the Galatians, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ," is followed at once by the contrasted caution, "For every man shall bear his own burden." Again, the Apostle teaches the Corinthians in the same verse,

"He that planteth and he that watereth are one: yet every man shall receive his reward according to his own labour." Other passages, in which a similar contrast appears, will suggest themselves on a careful perusal and study of the word of God.

2. Secondly, wherever selfishness is not complete, the same contrast is found in the elements which constitute human joy and sorrow, happiness and misery. In part, they are personal and subjective; while in part they arise from sympathy with the happiness of those whom we love, or from the contemplation of objective truth. How often has the wounded soldier or sailor almost forgotten his wounds in his deep joy for his commander's or his country's victory! The cases are frequent in which the sense of severe suffering is almost lost in some absorbing object of thought, or joyful tidings of the happiness of others who are deeply beloved. The Christian, whatever his personal peace and comfort, is often recalled to deep sorrow by the thought of abounding sin, of a dishonoured Saviour, and of perishing souls; and hours of bereavement have their anguish lightened by stedfast faith in the increased happiness of the friends whom death has removed. So that all happiness is of two kinds, personal or federal, one resulting directly from blessings strictly our own, and the other from sympathy with the joys of others, or from the contemplation of external and objective truth.

3. Thirdly, all the statements of Scripture with respect to eternal judgment and the opposite issues

of blessing and punishment, refer to the personal and individual characters of men,—"Every man shall bear his own burden." "Every one shall receive his reward according to his own labour." "My reward is with me, to render to every man as his work shall be." "He called his servants, that he might know how much each man had gained by trading." "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." The personal conduct is not only the ground of a personal sentence, but of unequal degrees of punishment and bliss,—"It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for you." "The servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, shall be beaten with many stripes." "Of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy, who . . . hath done despite to the Spirit of grace!" "He that soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly, and he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." "One star differeth from another star in glory." The result of this personal judgment, by the constant and repeated testimony of the Scriptures, is a final contrast, an eternal separation, depending on the use or abuse of the probation in this mortal life. Their earnest appeals to men to repent and turn to God derive their energy from this all-pervading truth, often expressed, and every where implied, in their large variety of warnings, threatenings, promises, and urgent and affectionate exhortations.

4. Let us now suppose that these statements of Scripture on the eternal contrast between the righteous and the wicked, the saved and the lost, however true, and however solemn, are not the whole truth, but that there is a further objective or federal element, common alike to both, which is nowhere in the Bible, in set terms, explicitly revealed. Let us suppose that the future condition of the lost will combine, with the utmost personal humiliation, shame, and anguish, the passive contemplation of a ransomed universe, and of all the innumerable varieties of blessedness enjoyed by unfallen spirits, and the ransomed people of God; such a contemplation as would be fitted, in its own nature, to raise the soul into a trance of holy adoration in the presence of infinite and unsearchable Goodness. If this were true, still there are weighty reasons why this aspect of God's purpose should not be early revealed. That love, which is the source of all the Divine messages, may be the reason why the All-wise refuses to unveil a part of truth, which, even in clearing His character from the blasphemies by which it is now assailed, might, through the perverseness of sinful hearts, deaden the conscience, paralyze the will, and obscure the momentous contrast between the results of present obedience and disobedience, so as to defeat one main object of all Divine revelation.

Assuming, then, the truth of the suggestion I have made, there is a weighty and sufficient cause why the Scriptures should have passed by this secret purpose of God in total silence, and leave it to be deduced by

patient thought and moral inference alone. The solemn contrast of reward and punishment can thus work its full effect, unmingled and unmitigated, upon the hearts of men.

The sternness of the Divine threatenings, and the refusal to weaken their terrors by revealing distinctly the contrasted truth, may, on this view, be seen hereafter to be the most wonderful illustration of God's perfect love. In the affairs of life it implies great nobility of character, to rest willingly for years under reproach and obloquy wholly undeserved, when these censures and calumnies would have been scattered in a moment to the winds by the publication of a secret, which some point of honour, some sense of public duty, or some promise, forbids the party so unjustly censured to reveal. This high excellence, rarely and dimly seen even in good and upright men, will perhaps hereafter be seen to belong in its full perfection to the Only Good. The willingness of the Most High to remain exposed for ages to all the blasphemies hurled against Him because of these solemn threatenings, may then be found to add a crowning excellence and beauty to the perfect manifestation of His redeeming love.

5. The silence of Scripture, then, or the want of direct and explicit statements of the view now suggested, is no disproof of its reality and truth. It is only a weighty reason why those who have found in it relief for their own perplexity should beware of a rash and hasty publication of their thoughts, lest they should run counter to the wisdom and love by which alone

that silence can be fully explained. Let us now inquire whether direct evidence cannot be found to confirm its truth, not on the surface of Scripture, or in distinct and specific statements, but drawn by simple inference from the main truths of the Bible, and confirmed by its agreement with all the secondary allusions, descriptions, warnings, and promises of the word of God.

And first, there is one frequent and serious error in popular views of future punishment, which, in the words of the Article, has no warranty of Scripture, but is plainly repugnant to the word of God. It is not uncommon to speak of lost souls as their own mutual tormentors, and given up to Satan to be tormented by him for ever. But this reverses the actual revelation. The judgment is not the time of Satan's power, but of his overthrow and punishment. Lost souls are never represented as at liberty to torment each other, but each as enduring, in passive subjection, a solemn sentence from the hand of God. To assume the perpetual continuance of active malice and permitted blasphemies, is to ascribe to God a dominion shared for ever with the powers of evil. It makes hell the scene of Satan's triumphant malice, just as heaven is that of the Creator's triumphant love. Yet the descriptions of that final doom imply the utter prostration and entire repression of all actings of the rebellious will under the immediate display of Infinite Holiness. Satan, in the last judgment, is no tormentor of lost souls, but only the foremost criminal, doomed to the deepest fall and heaviest punishment.

Now if the doom of lost souls involves an unwilling

acknowledgment of God's justice in their own sentence, must it not also imply a compulsory but real perception of all the other attributes of the Almighty? Must not the contemplation of infinite wisdom and love, however solemn the punishment and the compulsion by which alone it is made possible for those who have despised their day of grace, be still, in its own nature, unutterably blessed? The personal loss and ruin may be complete and irreparable, the anguish intense, the shame and sorrow dreadful, the humiliation infinite and irreversible. Yet out of its depth there may arise such a passive but real view of the joys of a ransomed universe, and of the unveiled perfections of the Godhead, as to fulfil, even here, in a strange, mysterious way, the predicted office of the Redeemer of souls, and to swallow up death in victory.

Such is the general nature of the conclusion in which my own thoughts have found repose, by which alone, I believe, the perfect truth of the solemn threatenings of our Lord and his Apostles can be seen to harmonize with the perfect and unchanging love of the Creator to all the creatures of his hand; while various hints of inspired Scripture receive their most expressive interpretation, and deep analogies, which lie below the surface, and only calm and patient and reverent thought can trace out and discern, are satisfied and fulfilled. But I reverence the silence of the word of God. And while these reflections may clear away, as they have cleared to my own spirit, some of the dark clouds which rest on the hope of the life to come, I count it true wisdom for

the Church and all its members to dwell most constantly on those aspects of God's purpose which are most explicitly and clearly revealed. We need to beware lest, in seeking to pierce the veil which shrouds the Divine glory, we should perish in breaking through to gaze, and lose the awakening power of those solemn messages which have come to us directly and plainly from the lips of the All-merciful and All-wise. I shall rejoice if the thoughts I have now offered, and the key-note they supply, are any relief to your perplexity, and help you to perceive how, in God's time, the darkness may be wholly rolled away. But I would counsel you affectionately to practise the same caution I have felt binding on my own conscience, and to suffer no reasonings, inferences, or conjectures on the deep things of God to weaken the power of that solemn contrast between the broad way and the narrow, eternal life and eternal death, which the Son of God himself has explicitly and solemnly revealed.

I remain, yours faithfully,

T. R. Birks.

LETTER VI.

THE STATE OF THE DEPARTED.

My dear Sir,

IV. Another subject on which your mind has been perplexed, is the occurrence of doubts about futurity, even in the minds of good and pious men. You quote from Mr. Robertson's sermons admissions of this kind, and ask whether this terrible ordeal of doubt is to be viewed as a trial through which every Christian has to pass.

A partial answer to this inquiry may be found in the broad statements of Scripture with regard to the nature of the soul's redemption. The state out of which every Christian has to be raised and rescued by Divine grace is one of spiritual blindness and almost total unbelief. A faint glimmer of eternal truth may remain, not wholly erased from the tables of the heart; but the Spirit of God uses the strong phrases, deaf, blind, gross, dead in sin, to describe the first condition of the soul, from which it has to be raised by the Gospel into newness of life. There are some cases, like that of St. Paul, where the

work of years seems to be compressed into a few days, and the soul, lately dead in sin, rises suddenly into a maturity of faith and spiritual understanding. In these cases the anguish of the first awakening may be very deep, but the later experience, comparatively, an unclouded sunshine of hope and joy. But in most cases the first transition is from practical neglect of eternal things to a weak and infant faith; which grows only through a gradual discipline, and successive stages of experience, mixed with temptation, to the full assurance of a ripened understanding, and a manly stature in Christ. In such cases there may be a frequent recurrence of doubts and questionings, even affecting the foundations of religious faith.

The testimony of Baxter on this point, in his autobiography, is very instructive and remarkable. He speaks as follows :—

"Whereas, in my younger days, I never was tempted to doubt the truth of Scripture or of Christianity, but all my doubts and fears were exercised at home, about my own sincerity, and this was what I called unbelief; since then, my sorest assaults have been on the other side; and such they were, that had I been void of internal experience, the adhesion of love, and the special help of God, and had not discerned more reason for my religion than I did when younger, I had certainly apostatized to infidelity, though for atheism or ungodliness my reason seeth no stronger arguments than may be brought to prove that there is no earth, or air, or sun. I am now, therefore, much more apprehensive than before of the necessity

of well grounding men in their religion, and especially of the witness of the indwelling Spirit, for I more sensibly perceive that the Spirit is the great witness of Christ and Christianity to the world. And though the folly of fanatics tempted me long to overlook the strength of the testimony of the Spirit, while they placed it in a certain internal assertion or enthusiastic inspiration, I now see that the Holy Ghost, in another manner, is the witness of Christ and His agent in the world. . . . There is many a one that hideth his temptations to infidelity, because he thinketh it a shame to open them, and because it may generate doubts in others. But I fear the imperfection of most men's care of their salvation, and of their diligence and resolution in a holy life, doth come from the imperfection of their belief in Christianity and the life to come. No petition seemeth to me more necessary than this, 'Lord, increase our faith;' 'Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief!'"

These words of one of the most cautious and profound of English divines are a direct answer to your inquiry. They show that temptations of this kind are very common, even among advanced Christians, though perhaps not strictly universal. But the Baptist's message does not warrant the superstructure the author you quote builds upon it, as if it implied an almost total failure of faith, in his last hours, of that "greatest among the woman-born." It implied much perplexity of heart, but a perplexity quite consistent with strong and real faith, else why send to our Lord for an explanation of the conduct he could not understand? The course of the Saviour

was widely different from what the stern Reformer of Israel had expected in that great Successor, whose fan was to be in His hand, to purge His floor, and who was to burn up the chaff with the fire of judgment. Now, on the contrary, He left his own forerunner neglected in the prison, and suffered the ungodly to oppress the righteous without let or hindrance. There was human infirmity, like that of Peter, when he cried, "Be it far from thee, Lord, this shall not be unto thee." But this infirmity, in either case, was quite consistent with the reality, and even the vigorous activity, of a genuine faith.

My own comparative freedom from the temptations to which Baxter alludes, I ascribe, under the Divine blessing, to an early habit of the inductive study of the word of God. I think it the only wise and safe course for the Christian inquirer, instead of seeking to determine the nature and properties of the soul by abstract reasoning, and to soar into regions where the air is almost too thin to sustain life, by abstract discussions on immortality, to remember that the great revealed hope of the Gospel is not death, but resurrection; and to dwell on that historical plan of redemption, from Genesis onward, which centres in the death and resurrection of Christ, and in His future return, and the resurrection of His people. These two great waymarks, in the past and the future, are both of them linked inseparably with a vast number of kindred truths. In this way the Christian, who studies the Bible with humility and perseverance, may attain an assurance of "the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come," almost as deep and firm as the consciousness

of his own existence, and not weaker than that which men of education usually feel with reference to the Newtonian theory, the law of gravitation, and the structure of the solar system, the surest parts of natural science. It is easy to perplex ourselves in abstract discussions on the soul's immortality. But death is a fact so strange and solemn, and in a certain sense so irrational, as in hours of temptation to obscure and confound all the conclusions we can draw by the strength of reason alone. Our conceptions, also, of a disembodied spirit are so dim, so mixed and entangled with bodily associations, that they will be apt to fail us when most we require their aid. And this may be one reason why the Scriptures practise here a marked reserve; and all their discoveries of the future centre in their testimony, that the Lord will return, and that in our flesh we shall see God, when also "this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality."

V. The Intermediate State is one of the last subjects on which you inquire. Is there, you ask, such a state between death and the judgment? Is it one of perfect consciousness? Will the righteous, at once, be perfectly happy, and the unrighteous entirely wretched? Does the idea of a sleep of the soul involve a denial of the resurrection, and do departed saints at once recognize and hold intercourse with each other?

Now first, that there is an intermediate state, to those who believe in the resurrection of the dead, will admit no doubt whatever. Unless there were no future existence, or else the resurrection were a change too insignificant to

deserve notice, such a state, whatever its precise character, there must clearly be. The real doubt must refer to these two questions, how far it differs from total unconsciousness on one side, and wherein, on the other, it differs from and falls short of the life of the promised resurrection.

On this subject small reliance, I think, ought to be placed on abstract reasonings concerning the faculties of the soul. It is equally unsafe to rely on popular impressions, which Christians take up loosely from one another, or from the prevalent religious literature, without ever applying by direct and careful search to the word of God, the sole fountain of inspired and certain truth. Through ambiguous and imperfect translations of the Hebrew Sheol, and the Greek Hades and Gehenna, conspiring with the love of a false simplicity, views of the state of the dead, not warranted by any clear or distinct Scripture evidence, nay, rather opposed to it, have prevailed widely, and still prevail, among many pious Christians. No impressions are more frequent and usual, in religious circles, and even beyond them, than that good men, when they die, go at once to heaven, or pass into glory. These statements occur perpetually in hymns and religious works, as if they were the plainest and most fundamental part of the Gospel. And yet, when we turn to Scripture, not one solitary text to justify either impression can be found. Neither in the Old Testament nor in the New can one instance be found, where the soul of the righteous, in dying, is said to rise to heaven, or enter at once into glory. The state of the departed is

represented as one of undress, of nakedness, of being unclothed, of waiting and expectation, though one of rest and peace to those that die in the Lord. The popular view, represented by the "Assembly's Catechism," seems to have grown directly out of the mingled impatience and unholiness of Christians in the latter days, and their widespread neglect of the great hope of the Church, the return of the Lord in glory. Tried by the images the Spirit of God employs, it is as unnatural as to dream of subjects being presented in their night-clothes at the levee and in the palace of an earthly sovereign. Three ideas are associated in the word of God with its brief descriptions of the departed righteous—humiliation, peaceful rest, and earnest expectation. One of these results from the nature of death in itself; one from the earnest of redemption already bestowed; and one from the hope of the full and perfect redemption still to come.

With regard to the consciousness or unconsciousness of departed spirits, it seems likely that Christians have generalized too much, and in opposite ways. It is clearly conceivable that, either in the sovereignty of God, or from the state in which the spirit leaves the body, the consciousness after death may sometimes be so dim, as to seem on the point of ceasing entirely: sometimes so full, and bright, and clear, as to seem almost like the glory of the resurrection begun. It will be hard to reconcile and explain all the statements of Scripture, if we assume that every statement must apply, in common, to every departed believer. David pleads for life in the words, "In death there is no remembrance of Thee; in the grave who

shall give Thee thanks?" while St. Paul has "a desire to depart, and be with Christ, which is far better." Yet the same Apostle speaks of the death of some Corinthian believers as a loss rather than a gain: "For this cause some are weak and sickly among you, and some sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged of the Lord. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." The resurrection of Lazarus and of Tabitha could scarcely be set before us as an act of Divine grace and favour, as well as power, if it brought them back from a far higher to a lower consciousness and measure of bliss. It seems the course which agrees best with deep reverence for the word of God, to let every passage retain its own features, and produce its own impression. Why may we not believe that separated spirits, according to their previous state, or the sovereign pleasure of God, may, some of them, be in a state so exclusive of all activity, as to be equivalent to "perishing" (1 Cor. xv. 18), if no awakening were to follow; and others in such joyous consciousness of the love of Christ, as to be far better than their ripest experience, while dwelling in the mortal body; so that the Paradise of the departed, in their case, may have a near approach to the higher privileges and fuller joy of the New Jerusalem?

I remain, yours faithfully,

T. R. Birks.

LETTER VII.

MUTUAL RECOGNITION.

My dear Sir,

VI. The mutual recognition of departed friends is the last subject on which you feel uncertainty, and ask for my judgment. This can scarcely be ranked under the head of Scripture difficulties. But since the topic is one of deep interest, and closely connected with great doctrines of the faith, I will freely offer a few remarks.

Now, first, with regard to the mutual recognition of redeemed saints after the resurrection, I do not see how a moment's hesitation can arise. It is either expressed or implied in all the descriptions of future blessedness: "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" "Then shall we know even as we are known." It seems plain that the knowledge Christians will then have of each other, of their whole character and history, will be far greater than in this present life. For now we live in a comparative solitude; and those who know each other best are still, to a great extent, mutual

strangers. If the disciples recognized Moses and Elijah, whom they had never seen, in the holy mount, how much more will those who are already known recognize each other in the kingdom of God!

In the intermediate state, before the resurrection, the case is widely different. Here there seems to me to be no evidence of such a recognition, and I incline strongly to an opposite view. The coming of Christ is described with plain emphasis as the time of "our gathering together unto Him." In that day, and not before, the Apostle expected his converts to be his joy and crown of rejoicing. The phrases by which their state is described —they that sleep, those that sleep in Jesus—though they by no means imply unconsciousness, are wholly adverse to the idea of direct intercommunion. Those who sleep together, even in the same chamber, however vivid their dreams in the night may be, have no communion with each other till their waking hour. The statement that all must give account of "the things done in the body," seems to imply that there are no actions out of the body, involving active choice and responsibility; which would not be true, if voluntary intercourse with each other were the law of their being. In that case, why should not Adam or Abel be made responsible for the five thousand years of accountable activity, since the time when their death occurred? The description of the patriarchs, that they were "gathered to their fathers," might seem, perhaps, to point to an opposite view. But the idea really conveyed, on a comparison of the passages, is only that of a separate resting-place, a sleeping-

chamber, in Sheol, or the grave, into which the souls of the righteous alone enter. So the prophet speaks of them: "He shall enter into peace, they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness."

Where the direct statements of Scripture are few and obscure, Christians will be apt to be guided rather by their own wishes than by the indirect evidence and constructive testimony of the word of God. When death is viewed, not as God's just sentence on a defiled nature, which must be broken down to be built anew, but only as a compulsory separation from beloved friends, there will be a strong bias on the mind to think the separation as short as possible. But God's ways are not as our ways. The discipline whereby He makes his children partakers of his holiness, often departs widely from their own ideas of what is most pleasant and desirable. My own instinctive feelings, I confess, are wholly opposite to those, from which many pious persons seem to derive their chief satisfaction, when they think of their departed friends. Must not the renewed intercourse of the departed with each other be a distraction and humiliation, rather than a joy and pleasure, while the work of redemption is still incomplete? Would Lazarus begin conversing with his sisters while the grave-clothes were still around him? The Scriptures plainly yield us no direct warrant for the classical or poetical fancy of "dialogues of the dead." "To sleep" is the negative, and "to depart and be with Christ," the positive aspect, of the state of the disembodied spirits of believers. And until that day, when this corruptible shall put on incor-

ruption, perhaps nothing may be so beneficial to the spirits of the just, so favourable to the high purpose which has marked all their life discipline, as their abiding in one unbroken trance of communion with the Lord himself. It may be well for them to remain undisturbed by lower fellowship, till their spiritual faculties, often so unripe when they leave the body, are strengthened and made ripe to endure the brightness of the judgment day and of the kingdom of God. All that is properly reward, as distinct from the inseparable results of a pure conscience and a regenerate heart, seems reserved by the Divine wisdom, that it may be received together by all His people. Thus patience has its perfect work, and their joy at last is a pure and unselfish joy.

It may be urged, perhaps, that in our Lord's parable a conversation is described between the rich man and Abraham. But it must be remembered that Abraham, the father of the faithful, into whose bosom Lazarus is borne, does not answer here to any common believer, but occupies the same place as our Lord himself in the New Testament. Between Lazarus and the angels, or Lazarus and the rich man, so far as the parable is a guide, there is absolute silence. The analogy is best maintained, if we suppose that, under the New Testament, departed spirits have communion with the Lord, in whose bosom the faithful rest, but with the Lord alone.

But the importance of the inquiry depends much on the question, how far we are warranted to delay the resurrection in our thoughts to a distant time? If we do, there must be a strong temptation to fill up the blank

of Scripture teaching with fancies of our own. This the Church of Rome and modern Protestant divines seem to have done in opposite ways. Is it not rather the voice of the Spirit, that the resurrection ought to seem to us so real and so near, and eternity so vast, as to make details on the mode of the spirit's separate existence of small moment, compared with direct revelations of the resurrection, and the life of the world to come? Must there not be wise and weighty reasons why the Spirit of God says so little on one subject, and so much on the other? Our wisdom, surely, is to tread closely in the footprints of His divine revelations. When we dwell on the separate state, a sense of dimness and uncertainty creeps over our mind, unless we clothe it with all the features of our present condition, and thus assume, virtually, that the resurrection is past already to the main part of the Church of Christ. But direct meditation on the resurrection itself, and the glory and happiness of the risen saints, must give precision, reality, and power, to our hope of the good things to come. It will enable us, through full confidence in the Saviour's love and the Divine goodness, to look forward without fear, sometimes even with desire, to that interval of separation from the body, through which every generation of believers but the last must pass on their road to the New Jerusalem of God.

You allude, in the close of your letter, to a hope you sometimes cherish that ultimately all created beings will be pardoned, though to act on that hope in this world would be most dangerous. Some former remarks will

show you my own impressions with regard to this surmise. But it may be well to add a few further observations.

Now if you mean by pardon, what I fear some persons mean by it, the cessation of vindictive malice on the part of God towards particular sinners, then such pardon is never given to any, because such malice has no existence, save in the chimeras of a conscience defiled and perverted by sin. Or if it means an act of grace, which shall admit the unholy, in their unholiness, to the vision of God, such pardon is an essential and inherent impossibility. Again, if we mean by it a miraculous act, after this life, whereby an exercise of Divine sovereignty effects the change in a moment in lost souls, which the Gospel and the Spirit have failed to effect here, without any further "sacrifice for sins" (Heb. x.), it is doubtful whether such a work is possible in its own nature, and the statements of Scripture give us the strongest reasons to disbelieve its future occurrence. Still further, if by this pardon be meant some act of mercy, which will blot out the deep contrast between the saved and the lost, and wholly undo and reverse the sentence solemnly denounced on the present rejectors of the grace of Christ; then the admission of such a hope would go far towards making God a liar in his most emphatic warnings to the sinner, and would destroy the consistency and moral truthfulness of a large part of the word of God.

On the other hand, if it be meant that the infliction of just punishment is not the whole of God's purpose towards the unsaved; but that, while His holiness is for

ever manifested in the fulfilment of His warnings, and in their own irreparable loss and shame, there will, even in the depth of that ruin, be such a display of the unchangeable love of the Holy Creator to all the creatures of His hand, such depths of compassion to the self-ruined, as, without reversing their doom, may send a thrill of wondrous consolation through the abyss of what would else be unmingled woe and despair,—I do believe, for many reasons, that such a display of God's all-perfect love is truly kept in store for the ages to come. While clear and explicit revelations of it have been strictly forborne for wise reasons, its truth may be deduced by humble and reverent hearts from a patient study of the Scripture, and from calm meditation on the sure victory of good over evil, and the mingling of mercy with judgment in the perfections of the Most High.

I have now replied briefly to most of the questions you have proposed. From the tenour of your notes, I trust that, with the blessing of God, you have gained some help and comfort from the thoughts which, in my own mind, have been the slow product of years of meditation. In closing these letters, I would commend you respectfully and affectionately to the teaching of that Blessed Comforter, whose appointed work it is to guide the people of Christ into all truth. With deep interest in your spiritual welfare, I remain,

Your friend and servant in Christ,

T. R. Birks.

NOTES

ON

COLERIDGE'S "CONFESSIONS OF AN INQUIRING SPIRIT."

Pp. 1, 38. "Seven Letters to a Friend, concerning the bounds between the right and the superstitious use and estimation of the sacred Canon, in which the writer submissively discloses his own private judgment on the following questions:—

"I. Is it necessary or expedient to insist on the Divine Origin and Authority of all and every part of the Canonical Books, as the condition, or first principle, of Christian Faith?"

Certainly not. This could not have been the case with the jailor at Philippi on the instant of his conversion, nor with the Church before the Canon was settled, nor, by parity of reasoning, since then. Yet still an implicit faith in this truth, derived from education alone, may be a great help towards explicit faith, when Christian experience has deepened, and spiritual knowledge been enlarged.

"II. Or may not the due appreciation of the Scriptures collectively be more safely relied on as the result and consequence of belief in Christ, and the gradual increase, in respect of particular passages, of our spiritual discernment of their truth and authority; supplying a test and measure of our own growth and progress as individual believers, without the servile fear that prevents or overclouds the free honour which cometh from love?" 1 John iv. 18.

But see p. 84 (108). If every step of your own progress has brought you nearer to a full conviction of the Divine wisdom of that Word in every part, why should you doubt what is the real asymptote to which the curve of your own varying judgment continually draws nearer and nearer, as you advance towards the full maturity of spiritual wisdom?

Let. I. p. 4 (40). "Even with regard to Christianity itself, like certain plants, I creep towards the light, even though it draw me away from the more nourishing warmth. Yea, I should do so, even if the light had made its way through a rent in the wall of the temple."

Surely the true light is ever joined with warmth, no less than the true warmth with light, for both proceed from Him who is the Sun of Righteousness. It is well, in religion, to avoid the charcoal fumes of mere animal warmth and excitement, but is it therefore more safe to follow a light without heat? To chase an *ignis fatuus* will lead us into danger, as really as the suffocating heat of a stove might bring on delirium and death. It is the sunlight of Divine truth which alone it is safe

to follow, and this ever warms, while it enlightens the soul.

Pp. 8—10 (43—45). "I take up this work (the Bible), with the purpose to read it for the first time, as I should read any other book, as far, at least, as I can or dare. For I neither can, nor dare, throw off a strong and awful prepossession in its favour; certain as I am that a large part of the light and life, in and by which I see, love, and embrace the truth, organized into a living body of faith and knowledge, has been directly or indirectly derived to me from this sacred volume, and unable to determine what I do not owe to its influence. But even on this account, because it has these inalienable claims on my reverence and gratitude, I will not leave it in the power of unbelievers to say that the Bible is for me only what the Koran is to the deaf Turk, and the Vedas for the feeble and acquiescent Hindoo. No, I will retire up into the mountain, and hold secret commune with my Bible above the contagious blastments of prejudice, and the fog-blight of selfish superstition. . . . There is a Light higher than all, the Word that was in the beginning, the Light, of which light itself is but the Shechinah and outward tabernacle, the Word that is light for every man, and life for as many as give heed to it. If between the Word and the written letter I still any where seem to myself to find a discrepance, I will not conclude that such there actually is; nor, on the other hand, will I fall under the condemnation of those that would lie for God, but seek as I may, be thankful for what I have, and wait."

There is nothing more miserable than the kind of faith some have in the Bible, which practically amounts to this—"I profess to believe every jot and tittle of the Scriptures to be true and divinely inspired; but whatever is asserted as true from those Scriptures is a mere human interpretation, which I am at liberty to receive or reject just as I please. All truth is *in* the Bible, but I cannot be certain of any one truth *from* the Bible." This is both the worst hypocrisy and a contemptible idolatry. Against this evil, prevalent in more mitigated forms, Coleridge can hardly be too severe. But it by no means follows, because we ought to begin by prizing the Bible for the great truths it contains, even before a deliberate and enlightened conviction of its plenary inspiration in every part, that growing light would not land us finally in that very truth, from which most of us, blessed be God, are taught in our childhood to set out, as our chart and compass in the research of saving doctrines. It is foolish to profess unbounded veneration for the Scriptures, while neglecting those great truths of redemption which are the groundwork and source of all their messages. It is like the zeal of the Capernaites to make our Lord a king, when blind to His secret and divine glory. But though He withdrew Himself from these zealots, it is not less true that He will yet be manifested as the King of Israel. The real lesson is that none can behold his visible kingdom who have not first received Him as the Author and Source of spiritual grace. So a zeal for the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures is worse than useless, when severed from faith in the great mysteries of redemption.

But when those truths are devoutly received, the inspiration of God's Word will shine out clearly; as Christ, soon after He withdrew from the multitudes, appeared to His faithful disciples in kingly glory on the holy mountain. The parallel may be traced further. It was not all the disciples, but three only, who had this earnest of His glory before the resurrection. And so also, while many Christians may have an external, unripe faith in the inspiration of the Scriptures, a full, deep, and ripe conviction of its truth is a high privilege, and belongs to those who receive heartily its central doctrines, and cleave to it in meditation and prayer, as those three Apostles to the footsteps of their Lord. The zeal of some nominal Christians for the Bible may be little better than that of Moslems for their Koran; but how wide the difference between the objects of that zeal! On one side, an impostor and a strange rhapsody; on the other, God's perfect word, and His own coequal and eternal Son.

Let. II. p. 13 (47). "In my last letter I said that in the Bible is more that *finds* me than in all other books put together; that the words of the Bible find me at greater depths of my being; and that whatever finds me brings with it an irresistible evidence of its having proceeded from the Holy Spirit."

In this letter Coleridge begins to tread on slippery ground. And first, as to the opening principle. It is plain that a Scripture truth must be held with a deeper and truer faith, when it *finds* a response in the conscience and will, than when no string of the heart vibrates in unison with its heavenly touch. Such faith alone fully

deserves the name (John iv. 42). But may I infer that whatever does not yet find me is not Divine? May such a negative article be tacked upon my creed without danger? What would this imply, but that the present attainments of every Christian are to be the standard of God's Word, and not that Word the standard of his attainments? Would it not go far to provide the infidel with an excuse for the total rejection of Scripture? Might he not say, They do not find me, and therefore I cannot receive them as Divine? Our Lord's rebuke would be the true answer, "But ye believe not, because my words have no place in you." The words may be perfect and Divine, and yet some of them may not *find* us, just because our hearts are unclean, or at least too contracted and narrow for truth so large and so various.

In all that follows, Coleridge seems to misconceive the doctrine against which he argues. Plenary inspiration needs to be distinguished from partial or imperfect inspiration on one side, but not less from mechanical dictation on the other. Now it is this last against which he argues throughout, and this is as remote from the general view as that which he himself mentions. The difference is evident. The mechanical dictation of Scripture would supersede altogether the will, conscience, and affections of the inspired writers, and reduce them to useful automata, penholders, and nothing more, of the Divine Spirit. What unnatural corollaries would result from such a view is self-evident. Mixed and imperfect inspiration, again, would reduce the Word of God to the same level with the writings of any other good men, or the works of

Chrysostom, Luther, or Leighton. Plenary inspiration differs from both. It supposes and assumes the spiritual will and enlightened understanding of the inspired penmen to be the channels of the truth; but it recognizes in their words, "good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over," with the still deeper wisdom of the Holy Ghost. In short, that the Spirit of God so guided, prompted, and overruled their thoughts and their words, as to make them the means of transmitting a complete and integral part of that Revelation, which His omniscient wisdom, from the first, designed to convey to the sons of men. Thus, while the sacred writers would have, to a certain extent, a full and intelligent concurrence with the messages they are used to deliver, there would be a further meaning, which they might not themselves apprehend, reserved for some distant age. And this agrees fully with repeated declarations of Holy Writ, 1 Pet. i. 10—12. Dan. viii. 26; xii. 8—10. Surely instead of "planting thorns and placing snares in God's vineyard," this view tends to remove them, while it helps us to see reflected, on the dewdrop in every thornbrake, some beam of the glory of the Sun of Righteousness.

P. 16 (50). "Let us therefore remove all such passages, and take each book by itself, and I repeat that I believe the writer in whatever he himself relates of his own authority, and of its origin. But I cannot find any such claim as the doctrine in question supposes, made by these writers, explicitly or by implication. On the contrary, they refer to other documents, and in all points express themselves as sober-minded and veracious

writers under ordinary circumstances are known to do."

There are here two objections. First, that the writers do not affirm their own plenary inspiration. Now in the books of Moses, Coleridge admits that there can be no dispute. "I find it asserted," he says, "that not only the words were given, but the recording of the same enjoined by the special command of God, and doubtless executed under the special guidance of the Divine Spirit." In the Prophets, again, most of their messages have that solemn preface, "Thus saith the Lord," &c. The objection, in the Old Testament, applies mainly to the later historical books. But the honesty of the record, and the general truth of the facts being admitted, it was of minor importance, for a time, whether these were thought to be properly inspired. Also the Spirit of God, in the prophets, was a spirit of meekness, and not of self-exaltation. As even Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest, it is less surprising that the prophets, in these cases, should not declare explicitly the inspiration of their own narratives. In the New Testament, however, the evidence is abundant, and one sentence alone of our Lord ought to decide it, Matt. v. 17, 18. It seems hard to conceive how the doctrine could be more plainly and strongly affirmed.

A second objection is the reference to other writers. But this is fully consistent with the only just view of inspiration. Our Saviour's own reference to the Baptist in proof of his Divine authority is an exact parallel. In itself it was needless, but for the weakness of others it

was desirable, a merciful condescension of love. "These things I say that ye may be saved." God is too gracious to deny us all secondary helps to our faith, even in His inspired word.

Again, there is no *petitio principii*, because many of the most conclusive passages are found in the words of our Lord himself, whom no Christian can suppose liable to mistakes and errors, even if lax enough to charge the Apostles with erroneous statements. The indirect manner in which the doctrine is affirmed is easily explained. An astronomer, who wishes to show an occultation or transit through a powerful telescope, does not distract his pupil in the midst of the observation, by stopping him to observe the skilful structure of the object-glass itself. This would only confuse his vision, and he will learn it by natural inference, when once the observation is complete. So also with the telescope of the inspired Word. Its Divine completeness is best learned, after we have experienced its sufficiency for its great objects, doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness.

P. 17 (51) *note*. "With one seeming exception, the texts in question refer to the Old Testament alone. That exception is 2 Pet. iii. 16. The word λοιπὰς is perhaps not necessarily so to be interpreted; and this very text formed one of the objections to the Apostolic antiquity of the Epistle itself."

It is a groundless assertion that even 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17, refers to the Old Testament alone. For in the former Epistle to Timothy St. Paul has already quoted St. Luke's Gospel as Scripture, 1 Tim. v. 18. Luke x. 7.

All his own Epistles, too, were now written. The first had been commended to the Churches with the solemnity of an oath, and as the Word of God, 1 Thess. v. 27; ii. 13; iv. 15; and in another the Corinthians were charged to receive his Epistle as "the commandment of the Lord." There are also two other texts, James iv. 5, and Jude 17, which refer, I believe, to Gal. v. 17—21, and 2 Pet. iii. 5. The word λοιπὰς, again, must of course include St. Paul's Epistles under the common name of Scriptures; and the text, far from being an objection to the genuineness of St. Peter's Epistle, is one of the clearest and strongest proofs of its authenticity.

P. 20 (53). "The Old and New Testament is but one Word, even the Word of God; and the letters and articulate sounds by which this Word is communicated to our human apprehensions, are likewise Divinely communicated. . . . This is the doctrine which I reject as superstitious and unscriptural. And yet as long as the conceptions of the revealing Word and the inspiring Spirit are identified and confounded, I assert that whatever says less than this says little more than nothing. For how can absolute infallibility be blended with fallibility? Where is the infallible criterion? How can infallible truth be infallibly conveyed in defective and fallible expressions?"

This is the real difficulty of the whole question. It is one which every system, whether it err from the truth on the right hand or the left, must somewhere encounter. Nor is the divergence of Coleridge from the common view so wide as it may at first appear. Both agree that the

Bible contains a rich, large, and most precious treasury of saving and eternal truth. Both agree that, as it comes to the hands of Christians in general, through copyists or translators, it has contracted somewhat of human imperfection. Copyists may have mistaken a few letters or words. The true reading, in several passages, may be uncertain. The best translators have sometimes missed the exact sense of the original. What, then, is the real difference? Coleridge extends to the first autographs the same principle which is commonly limited to secondary copies or mere translations. The distinction is very important, but not all-important. The great evil of his view is the latitude it gives to an elastic conscience for evading the authority of any part of God's Word, while still professing to pay it a general respect and deference. This is indeed a most serious danger. But the question still remains, how and where can fallibility be blended with infallibility? First, in the person of our Lord we see infallible truth in a human personality, employing the words of human language. That which was, in our Lord, a constant and unfailing reality, is quite conceivable in His chosen disciples on special and temporary occasions, designed for the lasting instruction and guidance of the Church. Only in our Lord the Spirit, who rested on Him without measure, rested on One completely able to receive and comprehend the heavenly gift in all its fulness. In the sacred writers the same Spirit not only fills but overflows the vessel by which his truth is conveyed; He not only occupies and quickens to its fullest limit the fallible intelligence, but

puts a meaning into the words beyond the reach of the writer's own comprehension. See Eph. iii. 17. 20. This may be mysterious, but is neither unnatural nor inconceivable.

Let. III. p. 25 (57). "I freely confess that my whole heart would turn away with angry impatience from the cold and captious mortal who, the moment I had been pouring out the love and gladness of my soul, while book after book, law, and truth, and example, oracle, and lovely hymn, and choral song of ten thousand thousands, and accepted prayers of saints and prophets, sent back, as it were, from heaven, like doves, to be let loose with a new freight of spiritual joys and griefs, were passing across my memory, at the first pause of my voice, and while my countenance was still speaking, should ask me whether I was thinking of the Book of Esther, or meant particularly to include the first six chapters of Daniel, or verses six to twenty of the 109th Psalm, or the last verse of the 137th Psalm?"

The sudden interruption might be unseasonable and in bad taste. But the graver question is, would this "captious mortal" have any ground for his captiousness? Would he not be wrong as well as troublesome? The previous description of the Word of God, in its general character, is vivid and beautiful. Are the exceptions sound?

To begin with the plainest, and yet perhaps, in Coleridge's view, the hardest instance, Ps. cix. 6—20. Has he forgotten the words of St. Peter, fresh from closest intercourse with the risen Saviour, on this very passage?

"This Scripture must needs have been fulfilled, *which the Holy Spirit by the mouth* of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus . . . And let another take his office," Acts i. 16—22. That very passage which Coleridge selects for doubt and excision, as not agreeing with reason and the moral sense, is one of those for which the direct inspiration of the Holy Ghost is most fully and unequivocally claimed by the first of the Apostles, just after the time when the Lord had "opened his understanding to understand the Scriptures," and had doubtless expounded this very text along with the others "in the Psalms concerning Himself," Luke xxiv. 44, 45. Surely it should teach a lesson of humility and caution, when such a man as Coleridge, intending to set others right, could be guilty of so strange an oversight. The Holy Spirit seems to provide a secret fence for the doctrine of entire inspiration in the very parts where it is most assailable on a careless view. This Scripture must *needs* have been fulfilled. It is the same phrase our Lord employs in speaking of His own pre-ordained sufferings, Acts i. 16. Luke xxii. 37; xxiv. 46. It implies a necessity resulting from the prophecy, and the truthfulness of God.

But next, the Book of Esther. Surely there is nothing here repugnant to the reason or moral sense. Whence, then, can the doubt arise? Is it from its purely historical character? But this would apply to one-half of the Bible. Is it from the absence of all moral purpose? The moral stands out in the boldest relief. Is it from want of connexion with the rest of the sacred history?

It is one main link in that preservation of the chosen seed, on which depended the fulfilment of the promise of Messiah, the seed of Abraham. Is it the want of testimony to its historical truth? The feast of Purim, then appointed to preserve the memory of the deliverance, has been observed for more than two thousand years down to this very day. Is it from the absence of the name of God? Coleridge, surely, could not stoop to such an objection, though it has been brought by others. Does the Most High never conceal His name in the works of Nature and of Providence? How, then, should the prophet exclaim, "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, our Saviour?" The words marvellously correspond. Never was God more conspicuously "a God that hideth himself," and still the God of Israel, and their Saviour, than in the narrative of this book. The objection, when examined, becomes only a fresh sign of the Divine wisdom and beauty of the message. The whole book is like a marvellous parable of the whole course of God's secret Providence for two thousand three hundred years. Perhaps there is no history in the Bible which yields clearer signs, to a spiritual vision, of proceeding, as its true Author, from the omniscient Spirit of God.

Again, the "captious mortal" is supposed to object to the first six chapters of Daniel. Why to these alone, and not to the rest of the book, which is a complete whole, and the last part not less obnoxious to doubters than the first? The objection must relate either to the history or the prophecy. If to the history, St. Paul may answer, who

includes Daniel and the Three Children among the most signal triumphs of faith, while they "stopped the mouths of lions, and quenched the violence of fire." Heb. xi. 33, 34. Would God, by his Apostle, borrow proofs of the energy and excellence of faith from historical falsehoods? Or else is it the prophetic part which awakens the misgiving? Why, then, does our Lord, in his only prophecy, single out "Daniel the prophet" for especial honour? The questions of ten thousand "captious mortals" are as dust in the balance, compared with the deliberate sanction of Him who is to be their Judge.

The last passage objected is Ps. cxxxvii. 9. Let us compare with it Ezek. ix. 5, 6, where there is a direct message from God addressed to the prophet. By Coleridge's own definition the Divine character of the latter passage is not open to doubt. Yet what difficulty can lie against the Psalm, which does not lie with equal force against those words of the vision? Three things are clear—that all great national judgments or calamities have included the young; that God is righteous in those judgments, and delights in the execution of righteousness; and that the highest and best state of the creature is to have full sympathy with the Creator, alike in righteousness and mercy. Each of these is demonstrable both from Scripture and reason. Combine them, and what difficulty remains, but the constant difficulty of the natural heart, which cannot easily be moulded into harmony of thought and will, either with the severity of God's holiness, or the tenderness of His compassion and grace?

P. 26 (58). "In the course of my Lectures on Dramatic Poetry, I, in half a score instances, referred my auditors to the precious volume before me, Shakspeare, and spoke enthusiastically both in general and with detail of particular beauties of the plays of Shakspeare, as in all their kinds and in relation to the purposes of their writer. Would it have been fair to infer an intention on my part to decide the question respecting Titus Andronicus, or the larger portion of the three parts of Henry IV.? Would not every genial mind understand by Shakspeare the unity or total impression comprising and resulting from the thousandfold emotions of delight, admiration, and gratitude excited by his works?"

How deceptive an illustration! Is it merely of the unity or general scope of Scripture that our Lord speaks when He says, "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall not pass from the law, till all be fulfilled?" "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than for one tittle of the law to fail." "This Scripture must be fulfilled that is written . . . for even the things that concern Me have a fulfilment." "The Scripture cannot be broken." It is unaccountable how Coleridge could read these and many other texts in the Gospels, and still conceive the case he has supposed to be analogous. They are wide as the poles asunder. If I had said, "Every jot and tittle of Shakspeare bears the full and clear impress of his wonderful genius," I should plainly express a strong opinion on the genuineness of all that is usually ascribed to him, unless at the time, or else-

where, I specified the plays or passages which I held to be spurious additions to his works. But where, in the Gospels or Epistles, are the specified exceptions to be found? The parallel, then, fails entirely.

P. 30 (62). "If the doctrine be less decisively Scriptural in its application to the New Testament, the temptation to doubt is likewise less. In point of fact it is the apparent or imagined contrast, the diversity of spirit, which sundry individuals have believed themselves to find in the Old Testament and in the Gospel, that has given occasion to the doubt, and in the hearts of thousands supplies fuel to a fearful wish, that it were permitted to make a distinction."

Here is an admission which seems to let in a stream of light on the whole argument. The objection, it seems, springs mainly from a repugnance to the real or fancied severity of certain passages in the Old Testament. But are there no severe and solemn statements in the New Testament? Let Matt. xxii. or Mark ix. or Rev. xiv. xviii. supply the answer. No doubt it is much harder for guilty creatures to rise into sympathy with the Divine judgments, than to acquiesce in a vague and general impression of God's mercy. But are we therefore to cut and carve the words of Scripture, rejecting those which are distasteful to us? or to pray for fuller light, that every colour, whether bright or dark, in the rainbow of the Divine perfections, may receive a true reflection in the inmost depths of our soul? Surely this last is the safer and higher course, the only one which it befits the humble Christian to pursue.

P. 31 (62). "Why should I not believe the Scriptures throughout to be dictated, in word and thought, by an Infallible Intelligence? I admit the fairness of the question, and eagerly and earnestly do I answer:— For every reason that makes me prize and revere these Scriptures,—prize them, love them, revere them beyond all other books. *Why* should I not? Because the doctrine in question petrifies at once the whole body of Holy Writ, with all its harmonious and symmetrical gradations, the flexible and the rigid, the supporting hard, and the clothing soft, the blood which is the life, the intelligencing nerves, and the rudely woven, but soft and springy cellular substance, in which all are embedded and lightly bound together,—this breathing organism, which I have seen stand on its feet as a man, with a man's voice given to it, the doctrine in question turns at once into a colossal Memnon's head, a hollow passage for a voice, a voice that mocks the voices of many men, and speaks in their names, and yet is but one voice and the same, and no man uttered it, and never in a human heart was it conceived."

All this passage and its context fight with a shadow. It is the doctrine of a bare mechanical dictation, running through all Scripture, and not of plenary inspiration, that is really refuted. The doctrine of Scripture is that all is inspired, all true, but that some portions were directly dictated, the greater part communicated in another way. One doctrine may be so misstated or strained as to be confounded with the other, but few practical Christians or learned Divines really hold what

is here assailed. What Christian supposes that David was a mere automaton in penning the Psalms which bear his name? Who ever formed such a conception of "the sweet Psalmist of Israel?" Who can doubt that even in Ps. xvi. many of the expressions were the utterance of his own feelings? Yet his words were so overruled that they applied to himself only in part, while every syllable was fulfilled in his greater Son, the main object of prophecy, the true Messiah of God.

Pp. 33—37 (65—68). "*Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord; curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof,* sang Deborah. Was it that she called to mind any personal wrongs, rapine, or insult that she or the house of Lapidoth had received from Jabin or Sisera? No, she had dwelt under her palm-tree in the depth of the mountain. But she was a *mother in Israel,* with a mother's heart, and with the vehemency of a mother's and a patriot's love; she had shot the light of love from her eyes, and poured the blessings of love from her lips, on the people that had *jeoparded their lives unto death* against the oppressors; and the bitterness awakened and borne aloft by the same love, she precipitated in curses on the selfish and coward recreants who *came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.* As long as I have the image of Deborah before my eyes, and throw myself back into the age, country, circumstances of this Hebrew Bonduca (Boadicea?), in the not yet tamed chaos of the spiritual creation; as long as I contemplate the impassioned, high-souled, heroic woman, in all the prominence and individuality

of will and character, I feel as if I were among the first ferment of the great affections, the prophetic waves of the microcosmic chaos, swelling up against, yet towards, the outspread wings of the Dove that lies brooding on the troubled waters. So long all is well, replete with instruction and example. In the fierce and inordinate I am made to know and be grateful for the clearer and purer radiance which shines on the Christian's path, neither blunted by the preparatory veil, nor crimsoned in its struggle through the mist of the world's ignorance; while in the self-oblivion of these heroes of the Old Testament, their elevation above all low and individual interests; above all, in the entire and vehement devotion of their total being to the service of their Divine Master, I find a lesson of humility, a ground of humiliation, and a shining yet rousing example of faith and fealty. But let me once be persuaded that all these heart-awakening utterances of human hearts, of men of like passions with myself, mourning, rejoicing, suffering, triumphing, are but a Divine Comedia of a superhuman Ventriloquist, that the royal harper to whom I have so often submitted myself as a many-stringed instrument for his firetipt fingers to traverse, while every nerve of emotion, passion, thought, that thrids the flesh and blood of our common humanity, responded to the touch—that this sweet Psalmist of Israel was himself as mere an instrument as his harp, an automaton mourner, poet, suppliant; all is gone, all sympathy at least, and all example. I listen in awe and fear, but likewise in perplexity and confusion of spirit."

"Yet one other instance, and let this be the crucial test of the doctrine. Say that the Book of Job throughout was dictated by an Infallible Intelligence. Then reperuse the Book, and still, as you proceed, try to apply the test; try if you can even attach any meaning, or semblance of meaning, to the speeches which you are reading. What! were the hollow truisms, the unsufficing half-truths, the false assumptions and malignant insinuations of the supercilious bigots, who corruptly defended the truth; were the impressive facts, the piercing outcries, the pathetic appeals, and the close and powerful reasoning with which the poor sufferer, smarting at once from his wounds, and from the oil of vitriol which the orthodox *liars for God* were dropping into them, impatiently, but uprightly and holily, controverted this truth, while in will and spirit he clung to it; were both dictated by an Infallible Intelligence? Alas, if I may judge from the manner in which both indiscriminately are read, quoted, appealed to, treated upon, by the *routiniers* of desk and pulpit, I cannot doubt that they think so, or rather without thinking take for granted that so they are to think; the more readily, perhaps, because the so thinking supersedes the necessity of all after thought."

There must be some strange misconception which entwines itself with the beautiful wreaths of poetry in this passage. Its general meaning seems to be—Deborah's zeal was noble and exalted, but fierce and inordinate; and the words she uttered, while they teach a noble lesson of animating devotedness and self-oblivion, bear also the traces of human infirmity and bitterness,

and may not without danger be ascribed to the Spirit of God in so full a sense as the orthodox doctrine requires.

Now in this there is a double error. First, Coleridge overlooks one important clause—"Curse ye Meroz, *said the angel of the Lord.*" It is the Covenant Angel, the Divine Logos, to whom the words in question are really ascribed. By the rule which Coleridge himself allows, the passage has to be taken out of the category of mixed or imperfect inspiration. But further, if the words had been Deborah's own, what proof could they yield of a chaotic state of the affections, that would not apply equally to the parting words of our Lord to the Pharisees, Matt. xxiii.? The liveliness of Deborah's emotions cannot disprove the inspiration of these words, without casting a deep and foul reproach upon the righteous severity of warnings uttered by the Incarnate Son of God.

It might well be allowed that in Deborah's heart the Divine message caught something, in its reflection, of earthly weakness. Her zeal for God may have been mingled with national zealotry, and her love for Israel with secret kindlings of martial pride, or even her denunciations of Meroz with secret whispers of self-righteous exaltation. But the light of heaven is not less pure when it shines on a troubled stream. The inspired song of praise which she sang need not be less pure and holy, because its echo, even in the heart of the Prophetess, might catch from the imperfectly regenerated soul some jarring dissonance. The truth of inspiration,

rightly conceived, detracts nothing from the reality of deep emotions in the heart of the messenger, while it adds greatly to the authority, the fulness, and the glory of the message. The description applies to the earliest as well as the latest revelations—"The words of the Lord are pure words, as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times in the fire." Only it must be remembered that they are also *purifying* words; and therefore, without losing their own purity, condescend both to seeming and real contact with persons and things impure. This is especially true in the first stages of the inward work of redemption, and, by parity of reason, in the earliest parts of Revelation. The light of heaven shone in the darkness. But it was only in order to turn it into brightness, abiding itself in spotless and stainless beauty.

The second instance is equally misconceived. For what is the received doctrine with regard to the Royal Harper? Not that we are to deny him his own title, given him by Scripture itself, the sweet Psalmist of Israel, but only that we are to acknowledge in his words that deeper and higher truth—"The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His words were on my tongue."

How fully are both these truths, in their contrast, confirmed by our Lord himself in the New Testament! Matt. xxii. 43—45. "Why then doth David himself in spirit call him Lord?" First, David speaks in his human person, else the contrast fails. And yet he speaks inspired and certain truth. David *in spirit* called him Lord. Our Saviour would surely never rest so wonderful a claim as that of proper Godhead on one

solitary word of an uninspired man. The argument, on such a view, would be monstrous and indefensible. And this shows the dangerous tendency of that laxer school of thought which Coleridge has here espoused.

Let us turn to what is called "the crucial test" of the Book of Job. Here, with all due respect be it spoken, Coleridge is surprisingly rash and unaccountably superficial. The subject has its real difficulties. But he does not solve one of them, and quite misunderstands the common view. First, the book is a narrative, and not, as he elsewhere explains it, with several German theologians, a dramatic fiction. See Ezek. xiv. Jas. v. 11. Surely no one was ever so foolish as to suppose that in every inspired narrative the words of every speaker are inspired, as the blasphemies of Pharaoh, and the lies of the old prophet of Bethel. Still, the record of these may be from the All-wise Spirit, no less than the record of the words of Prophets and Apostles. And again, when God expressly rebukes them in the words, "Ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath," who can infer at once that all the words of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, are in every sense inspired truth? Inspiration, then, does not, of itself, require us to pronounce upon the statements of Job and his friends. Both were reproved by God himself, though with unequal censure.

But here a second question arises. Were their discourses simply false, or merely truth ill-timed and misapplied? We can scarcely read them without being driven to the latter view. And this is strongly con-

firmed by St. Paul's authority, who quotes from the first speech of Eliphaz as inspired Scripture (1 Cor. iii. 19. Job v. 13). Surely, then, even the *routiniers* have no despicable authority for the practice Coleridge treats as absurd. What was Divine wisdom in the Apostle need not be denounced, in their case, as mere thoughtless folly. Like Job's friends, they may sometimes grievously misapply the truth they borrow. But this is equally possible with texts of the most unquestionable inspiration, as the Sermon on the Mount, or the words of Christ respecting the after-life of the beloved disciple.

In truth, Coleridge seems to have a very faulty view of the book on which he grounds his censure. He seems wholly to invert Elihu's character, and even adds darker features to the other friends than the account will justify. To treat them merely as malignant, supercilious bigots, is simple caricature. They were true friends, and their tears and silence attested the depth and sincerity of their sorrow. They were righteous men, and zealous for God and for righteousness. But they lived in a time of dimmer light, when godliness had eminently the promise of the life that now is; and Job was dealt with after the law of a higher dispensation, the main features of which were still unknown. Hence their affection, tears, and honour, from imperfect knowledge of God's ways, were soon turned into doubt, censure, suspicion, and at last into direct calumny. The words they uttered were, in the main, sacred truths, but truths misapplied, that wrought the effect of calumnious falsehood.

Let. IV. p. 39 (68). "If, with the exception of the passages already excepted, the recorded words of God, the Tenet in this sense be inapplicable to the Scripture, destructive of its noblest purposes, contradictory to its own express declarations, again and again, I ask, What am I to substitute? What other sense is conceivable that does not destroy the doctrine it professes to interpret—that does not convert it into its own negative?"

What a surprising leap does Coleridge here make in reaching his conclusion! It is absurd to think that the recorded speeches of Pharaoh, or Saul, or the old prophet, or Rabshakeh, or Sanballat, or the orator Tertullus, are inspired truth; and therefore the Scriptures which record these sayings cannot be inspired, or purely and wholly true. Surely, to a simple mind, there is a wide open space between these limits. A record may be inspired truth selected by the Holy Spirit, and still it may recount many sayings of wicked men, and even sayings of good men that are neither true nor wise. The expostulation is aimed against a sentiment which hardly any one has ever espoused; the argument against a doctrine which our best and soundest divines have ever maintained, as taught directly by our Lord's own emphatic sayings.

The next objection is against the minute correctness of the Scripture histories, a topic wholly distinct from the former, with which it seems to be confounded.

Let us examine this new objection for a moment. And first, what does Coleridge himself allow? That the discrepancies are so trifling as to make it highly pro-

bable, in some instances, and perhaps possible in all, that they are only apparent. Can such difficulties, then, be a sufficient reason for setting aside a doctrine which *seems* to be many times asserted by our Lord himself, and without which the fence is removed from the Word of God, so that every one may feel at liberty to receive just as much or as little as falls in with his own prepossessions? Surely not!

Again, allowing that many harmonies have been defective, is it needful to reflect their errors in imputations against the narratives themselves? Coleridge seems to have been misled by the theories of the German divines of last century, first imported into this country by Bishop Marsh. The analogy of human histories is very deceptive, when we remember the vast importance of the revelation, and the character of the Gospels as the law of faith to the Christian Church. For if it was true of the law of Moses that not one jot or tittle could pass till all was fulfilled, surely the same might be affirmed of the Gospels, whose brighter light throws even the former into the shade. The words of Greswell are here very true: "Some of the events are falsely reputed to be the same, and are not even similar; others are proved by the testimony of the same Gospel to have happened more than once. And it is far better, on every principle, that either actions or discourses should be considered to have occurred again, than that the historians should be set at variance, and their credibility be endangered, by obstinately pronouncing such events to be the same. There is little antecedent improbability

in the former, while there is the utmost hazard to Christian truth in the latter. In a ministry of three years' duration, every day of which was similarly employed, a great deal of historical matter must and would come over again, the same incidents frequently transpire, similar and almost identical miracles be performed; and any one Evangelist who had recorded such things in one instance of their occurrence, might pass them over for that very reason in another. And this is precisely the case: they are not found twice over in the same Gospel, nor at corresponding points of time in different Gospels. . . . If such and such parts of their narrative are not actually the same, it is in vain to attempt to make them so, without submitting them to a torture like that of the bed of Procrustes."

P. 43 (71). "Here there can be neither more nor less. Important or unimportant gives no ground of difference, and the number of the writers as little. The secretaries may have been many, the historian was one and the same, and He infallible. This is the minor of the syllogism." . . .

No difference! yes, a great difference. Let us consider three or four conceivable hypotheses. First, that every writer was divinely inspired, and his hand infallibly guided, and every copyist and translator also miraculously overruled, so that no cursive error in mistranslation should ever mar the perfection of the Scripture copies and versions. Secondly, that the writers were inspired, and their mind infallibly guided, and their hand also miraculously or providentially overruled in writing, but

copyists and translators left to the common laws of providence and of human infirmity. Thirdly, that the minds of the writers were inspired with perfect truth, clothed in fit expressions, but their hand, as amanuenses of the unwritten word, liable to error like their own copyists. Fourthly, that they were infallibly inspired as to doctrine, but only assisted or indirectly guided, in various degrees, with regard to facts of history. Fifthly, that in historical matters they were left wholly to their own natural and unaided diligence. Sixthly, that in points of doctrine their inspiration was nothing more than those promptings of God's Spirit which are common to all writers who are good and honest men.

Now the first view alone leads to a result mathematically and absolutely complete. In all the others the question is one of degree, since no one ever saw or read in one volume all the autographs of the two Testaments. The difference between the second and third is comparatively unimportant. That between the third and fourth might be so, if the suspensions of full inspiration, replaced by partial suggestion, were few, and we had any test by which to discern them. But since these conditions are plainly wanting, the difference, which in the abstract might be small, becomes vast and momentous. Either on the second or third hypothesis, the slight variation of our present copies from the Divine autograph, mental or external, might be passed by in silence in a general statement of the doctrine of inspiration. But, on the other hypothesis, we cannot really be sure of any part that it is the word

of God, and not merely the mistaken assertion of fallible men.

P. 43 (71). "In fact, it is clear that the harmonists and their admirers held and understood the doctrine literally. And must not that divine likewise have so understood it, who, in answer to a question concerning the transcendent blessedness of Jael, and the righteousness of the act in which she inhospitably, treacherously, perfidiously murdered sleep, the confiding sleep, closed the controversy by observing that he wanted no better morality than that of the Bible, no other proof of an action being praiseworthy than that the Bible declared it worthy to be praised?"

How much better, though far more difficult, to untie the knot in a case like this, than by rudely and hastily cutting it to endanger the faith of Christians in the most solemn statements of the word of God! No doubt it is true that it is far better that a single text should be set aside, than to contravene the whole scope and tenour of revealed truth. But is the difficulty inexplicable? The case resembles that of the midwives, of Rahab's treatment of the spies, of the Gibeonites and others. In all these the action is mixed. There was real faith in God, and that He was a party in the controversy against the sin of the Canaanites, and the oppressions of Jabin. But approval of the faith, which in each case was the mainspring of the action, by no means implies an approval of the deceit by which that faith was attended, and its true character obscured. Yet faith in God is precious and blessed,

even in spite of a grievous intermixture of corruption or infirmity; because, as it grows and strengthens, it has power to root out and destroy the very evils and corruptions which disguise and obscure its moral beauty. But to adopt the principle in the "Confessions" would tend to abolish all use of Scripture as a moral guide.

Pp. 45. 73—"Or who exclaims 'wonderful,' when they hear that Sir M. Hale sent a crazy old woman to the gallows, in honour of the witch of Endor?"

This passage is merely an appeal to the prejudices of an anti-spiritual and Sadducean age. To the sincere believer in God's word, Sir M. Hale's belief in the existence of witches is far more reasonable than Coleridge's professed disbelief in the existence of angels. There is no good reason for doubting the truth of Sir Matthew's dictum, whatever be thought of the application. To those who have any adequate view of the power and malice of evil spirits, and the corruption of sinful men, the wonder will not be that witchcraft should exist, but that distinct cases of its occurrence should be so rare. But it seems a part of the Divine economy that, while the open agency of good angels is restrained or suspended, the malice of bad angels should be put under a like restraint. Nor does it seem that the double embargo will be removed, at least until some brief hour of especial temptation, before the full revelation of the kingdom of God.

Pp. 45, 46 (74, 75). "But I challenge these divines and their adherents to establish the compatibility of a belief in the modern astronomy and natural philo-

sophy with their and Wesley's doctrine respecting the inspired Scriptures, without reducing the doctrine itself to a plaything of wax."

How inconsistent with Coleridge's own admission at p. 24 (48), where he says that incompatibility exists only between "the first and second," or the language of sense and of science, both of them being "indifferent and of equal value to the third," or the language of philosophy! Yet here that the Bible employs consistently the language of *sense* is made an argument against its full inspiration, in the teeth of his own express decision. The simile of the bladder is as wholly inapplicable as it is pretty and ingenious.

P. 46 (75). "Now I pray, which is the more honest . . . self-justification."

It may be the less of two evils to adopt a lowered theory of inspiration, and still to bring a cautious and reverent spirit to the perusal of Scripture in each particular case; rather than in terms to assert loudly the full perfection of the Bible, and then to treat it with a bold, presumptuous spirit, distorting it, without scruple, into the mould of systems of human manufacture, or subjecting it to all the rash glosses of a wild and untamed imagination. But the less of two great evils is not therefore a good. The thoughtful Christian will desire to be kept far from either of these errors. No doubt, when the evil heart of unbelief prevails, every truth retained becomes a fresh occasion of scandal and sin. But this is no just reason for paring down our creed to a minimum, under the vain fancy that we shall

thus deter others from stumbling at the threshold of faith to their own ruin.

P. 47. "When in my third letter I first asked the question, Why should I not? the answers came crowding to my mind. I am well content, however, to have merely suggested the main points, in proof of the positive harm our religion sustains from this doctrine. Of minor importance, yet not to be overlooked, are the forced and fantastic interpretations, the arbitrary allegories, and mystic expressions of proper names to which this Bibliolatry furnished fuel, spark, and wind. A still greater evil, and less attributable to the visionary humour and weak judgment of the individual expositors, is the literal rendering of Scripture in passages which the number and variety of the images employed to express one and the same variety plainly mark out for figurative."

These two objections really destroy one another. What! the same doctrine teach us to allegorize the literal and to literalize the allegorical! This is tirade and mere prejudice, not argument. The objection is merely this, that faith in the inspiration of the Scriptures cannot ensure perfect wisdom in their interpretation, and does not hinder many expositors from diverging widely from Coleridge's own judgment on the question, what is literal and what figurative. Such errors, even admitting their reality to the extent implied by his words, are in no respect chargeable on the doctrine under review. The only way in which it could affect them is by giving a deeper sense of the vast importance

of the Scriptures, and thereby securing to them a greater measure of thought and careful study.

P. 48 (76). "And lastly, add to all these the strange, in all other writings unexampled, practice of bringing together into logical dependence detached sentences from books composed at the distance of centuries, nay, sometimes a millennium from each other, under different dispensations, and for different objects."

How strange and instructive that Coleridge here lays an indictment, which applies just as strongly to St. Paul as to preachers and writers of the present day! For, passing by Hebrews, about the authorship of which he is sceptical, let any one read Rom. iii. ix.—xi., and he will see that the Apostle, taught by the Holy Spirit, does that repeatedly which is here denounced as unnatural and absurd. Nay, St. Peter lays this down for the first condition of true insight into Divine prophecy (2 Pet. i. 20, 21). The very first truth we need to learn for our guidance is, that no prophecy is an isolated composition of man, depending on itself alone for its solution, but must be solved by comparing it with the rest; because all are parts of one harmonious system, of which the true Author is the Spirit of God. Nothing can be more flatly opposed to the rebuke which Coleridge here utters than this parting admonition of the great Apostle.

P. 48 (76). "Accommodations of elder Scripture phrases, that favourite ornament of Jewish eloquence, incidental allusions to popular notions, traditions, apologues, as the dispute between the devil and the Arch-

angel about the body of Moses; fancies and anachronisms imported from the synagogue of Alexandria by the Septuagint version, and applied as mere *argumenta ad hominem*, as the delivery of the law by the disposition of angels; these, detached from their context, and, contrary to the intention of the writer, first raised into independent theses, and then brought together to produce some new credendum, for which neither separately could have furnished a pretence! By this strange mosaic, Scripture texts have been worked up into possible likenesses of purgatory, Popery, the Inquisition, and other monstrous abuses."

How true are those words of caution in Spenser—

> "He that erreth once from the right way,
> The further he doth go, the more doth go astray."

The one grand error of the book misleads Coleridge, even with his deep thought, into minor errors without end.

And first, as to this dispute of Michael and the devil, what evidence have we that such a *tradition* existed? Or, supposing it did exist, how could this prove the idea to be groundless? How strange and unnatural that, with abundance of instances to illustrate the sin, St. Jude should quote a groundless and vain tradition! It would be just as natural to suppose that an Apostle would quote Æsop's Fables in one of his most earnest appeals to the conscience. And who can read Dan. x. and Zech. iv., and not feel the entire harmony between their statements and those in St. Jude? Once suppose the whole

statement to be true, divinely inspired, and now revealed to the Apostle, and by him to the Church, and how solemn and impressive the whole passage will appear! Suppose it to be mere fiction, with no answering event, and its solemnity disappears. It becomes worse than puerile folly.

How strange, again, that such a mind could acquiesce in such an explanation, so meagre and shadowy, of the allusions to angels at the giving of the law! Acts vii. 53. Gal. iii. 19. Heb. ii. 2. What! the touching, powerful, impressive discourse of the first martyr, of which the very object was to uproot the prejudices of the Jews, in the climax of its most earnest appeal to their conscience, contain the direct assertion of a falsehood, in order to flatter those prejudices at the moment when he is reproving them with just severity! How monstrous the supposition! And on what ground is it affirmed? Because "it was imported from Alexandria with the Septuagint version." If Coleridge had studied the word of God more profoundly, he would have escaped these wretched trammels of German neology. The doctrine is taught as plainly as possible in Ps. lxviii., long before the date of the Greek version or the Alexandrian synagogue. Even apart from this distinct assertion, it might be inferred from the general current of Scripture. The voices as of a trumpet, and the flames of fire, if its uniform tenour is to be our guide, were tokens of the presence of angels when the Lord came down upon the holy mount.

P. 50 (78). "It will, perhaps, appear a paradox, if,

after all these reasons, I should avow that they weigh less with me against the doctrine than the motives usually assigned for maintaining and enjoining it. Such, for instance, are the arguments drawn from the anticipated damage that would result from its abandonment; as that it would deprive the Christian Church of its only infallible arbiter in questions of Faith and Duty; suppress the common and only inappellable tribunal; that the Bible is the only religious bond of union and ground of unity among Protestants, and the like. For the confutation of this reasoning it might be sufficient to ask, Has it produced these effects? Would not the contrary statement be nearer to the fact?"

The relative importance of the doctrine that all Scripture is fully inspired may, doubtless, be overstated. It *is* overstated when this truth is magnified beyond its Scriptural proportions. If the Gospel of St. John contains, as we are told, truth enough for salvation (chap. xx. 30, 31), the same amount of inspired truth diffused through the Bible, the rest being uninspired, might, if it had pleased God so to reveal Himself, have sufficed for the same purpose. But though the doctrine is not primary, and does not, strictly speaking, enter into one of the Creeds, still, if true, it must be highly important, and cannot be rejected without loss to the soul, and casting some dishonour on the Holy Spirit and the word of God.

The confutation in this passage proceeds wholly on false ground. Is it among those who own the full inspiration of the Scriptures that heresies have been most rife? Certainly not, either in ancient or modern times.

The Gnostics, Valentinians, Marcionites, and Manicheans in early ages, and the Socinians and Neologians of later days, to whom we may add the Tridentine Church, with its Apocryphal Canon, are all of them cases in proof of this latter view.

Pp. 51—53 (79, 80). "The Bible is the appointed conservatory, an indispensable criterion, and a continual source and support of true belief. But that the Bible is the sole source; that it not only contains, but constitutes, the Christian Religion; that it is in short a Creed, consisting wholly of Articles of Faith; that consequently we need no rule, help, or guides, spiritual or historical, to teach us what parts are and are not Articles of Faith, all being such . . . this scheme differs widely from the preceding, though its adherents often make use of the same words in expressing their belief. And this latter scheme was brought into currency by and in favour of those by whom the operation of grace, the aid of the Spirit, the need of regeneration, the corruption of our nature, all the peculiar mysteries of the Gospel were explained and diluted away."

There may doubtless be an idolatry of the Bible, as of any other Divine gift; and from this danger the Church has never been wholly free. Whatever some may assert, there is a real subordination in the various truths and doctrines of Scripture. To erect the Bible into the exclusive means of instruction and guidance, and thereupon to despise the Church, the Ministry, the Sacraments, or even the Book of Nature, is to contradict the Bible itself, and does violence to some of its most express

and solemn statements. The theory which starts with such a false assumption may naturally proceed, in a later stage, to reject the Person and work of the Holy Spirit; and thus end by reducing the Bible to a mere lifeless carcass, which the critic proceeds to carve and dissect at pleasure, with a loathsome familiarity of fancied anatomical skill.

Pp. 52—54 (80, 81). "And how have these men treated this very Bible? . . . I, who hold that the Bible contains the religion of Christians, but who dare not say that whatever is contained in the Bible is the Christian religion—I tremble at the processes which the Grotian divines, without scruple, carry on in their treatment of the sacred writers, as soon as any texts declaring the peculiar tenets of our Faith are cited against them; which, according to my scheme, every Christian born in Church membership, ought to bring with him to the study of the sacred Scriptures as the master key of interpretation. Whatever the doctrine of infallible dictation be in itself, in their hands it is in the last degree nugatory. . . . Every sentence in a canonical book, rightly interpreted, contains the *dictum* of an infallible mind; but what the right interpretation is, or whether the words be corrupt or genuine, must be determined by the industry and understanding of fallible and prejudiced theologians!"

These remarks are forcible and true when applied to the Grotian school of divines. To hold in words the plenary inspiration of Scripture, while rejecting its fundamental truths, is a wretched pretence or delusion. But

what does this really prove? That the doctrine in question cannot long be retained in a declining state of faith and spiritual life. Thus it forms a kind of spiritual barometer. Mere adhesion may sometimes keep the mercury to a high level when the sky is lowering; but the least shock, almost a touch, reveals the declension, and the altered state of the atmosphere. Thus the doctrine in question may be outwardly retained for a moment, when the heart is revolting from the great truths of the Gospel; but, after the first shock in the world of thought, Grotian divines will be succeeded by theologians of a bolder school, and a lowered view of the Bible, as a work merely human, will be openly and boldly maintained. The hypocrisy which Coleridge here condemns is most repulsive to an ingenuous mind. To profess in words that the Scriptures are inspired, and then to ascribe to them a travesty of their real meaning, which would convict any other writer of incompetence or gross dishonesty, is miserable trifling. The only conclusion, however, which needs to be drawn, is the folly of poisoning children with strong meat unsuited to their weak appetite; or the worse folly of casting pearls before swine, who have no capacity to apprehend even the simplest lessons of the Christian faith.

P. 54 (81). "And yet I am told that this doctrine must not be called in question, because of its fitness to preserve unity of faith. . . . For the prevention of an evil which already exists, and which the boasted preventive itself might rather seem to have occasioned, I must submit to be silenced by the first learned infidel who

throws in my face the blessing of Deborah, or the cursings of David, or the grievous and heavier difficulties in the biographical chapters of the Book of Daniel, or the hydrography and natural philosophy of the Patriarchal ages. I must forego the prospect of convincing an alienated brother, because I must not answer, My brother, what has all this to do with the truth and worth of Christianity? . . . Thorns are not flowers, nor is the husk serviceable. But it was not for its thorns, but for its sweet and medicinal flowers that the rose was cultivated; and he who cannot separate the husk from the grain, wants the power because sloth or malice has prevented the will."

We are on slippery ground when we maintain any doctrine, true or false, on account of its supposed consequences alone. Truth, if it is to be held firmly, must be held for its own sake, and by the light of its own evidence. Our faith must else be a reed shaken with every wind; for who can trace all the consequences of a single action, or of one solitary maxim in the world of thought? Still, so far as results are traceable, whatever is proved to be true will be found to be profitable. The notion, it has been well said, that faith will be confirmed by giving up subordinate points, rests entirely on self-deception. That it is contradicted by experience is easily shown. Is morality, for instance, strengthened, when we are careless in small matters, and seek to be right only in great ones? Is not faithfulness in small things the surest means of moral improvement? How much the assertion contradicts the nature of faith

is confirmed by many instances where the doubts of unsettled minds find support on this very ground, and thence extend themselves to other points of the Christian faith.

The whole tone of this page is very unhappy. It is not fair to allege that the doctrine is maintained merely as useful, with no prior conviction of its truth. It is no fair test of a doctrine being useful, to ask whether it has prevented all heresies. It is most unreasonable to make the garbled version of Socinians one consequence of a doctrine, which it is notorious that most Socinians disclaim. It is not true that the doctrine has occasioned the evil of divisions. On the contrary, when those divisions run to seed, they invariably lead to a rejection of the doctrine, or efforts to lower it, as in German Neology, and Tracts for the Times on the chance-medley formation of Scripture.

Again, the whole question is assumed, that the Christian needs to be silenced, that the difficulties are real, not imaginary. For why stay at the points selected? If the "cursings of David" are such a stumbling-block, why not the "woes" denounced by the Son of David (Matt. xxiii.)? If the Book of Daniel, quoted by our Lord, is to be set aside, why not the Apocalypse, with which the infidel quarrels just as strongly? Take what Coleridge seems to think the strongest case: try it on grounds of pure reason, and how rash the assumption must appear! If no action may have a blessing pronounced on it but one of unmingled moral goodness, no blessing could ever reach this fallen world. But if it be lawful for holy men, and, much more, for God himself, to pronounce a blessing

on mingled actions, so that the good is dwelt upon and the evil passed by, who dare pretend, after three thousand years, to be wiser than Scripture, and to affirm that Jael's deed was unmingled sin? If there were a righteous zeal for God and His people, however much sin may have defiled it, who shall prescribe to the God of love and holiness, where He shall pronounce, and where He shall withhold His blessing? The presumption and the folly are enormous when, under the covert of such an axiom, the word of God is defamed and assailed. After Israel's foulest sins in the wilderness, it is said presently: "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, nor seen perverseness in Israel." Must these words be another missile by which the infidel is to silence us, and prove the word of God immoral? especially since here the miracle of the ass must be thrown into the scale. It is more important, doubtless, to hold wilful treachery a hateful sin, than to receive one chapter of Judges as part of the inspired word of God. But the scruples of our author, once allowed, would uproot our faith in *all* Scripture. Thus, for example, Rahab lied flatly to the king of Jericho. But St. James pronounces her to be justified by this very act, therefore the Epistle of St. James is not inspired. St. Paul commends her by the same proof, therefore the Epistle to the Hebrews must be rejected. Jehu is praised for destroying the house of Ahab, and yet it plainly appears that self-interest was his chief motive, therefore we must expunge the Second Book of Kings. And thus, when the talisman is broken, and the smoke of this one error is let loose, it soon expands

into an enormous monster, a giant enemy of the truth of God.

The answer in all such cases is easy and simple. Where mixed actions are recorded, God, in His wisdom, may sometimes see fit to record His blessing on them for the good, or His judgment and curse for what is evil. Uzzah, no doubt, had a pious wish to preserve the ark of God, but in the manner there was rashness and haste. The word of God marks this only, and the hand of God visited him in judgment. In Jael there was a breach of confidence to a stranger, but genuine zeal for the cause of God and of Israel against one who had long been a fierce and cruel oppressor. The words of the song dwell on her act in the latter aspect alone. Lot committed a hateful incest. Yet St. Peter says of him only: "That righteous man . . . vexed his righteous soul with their unlawful misdeeds." It is strange that Coleridge should overlook a principle so simple and natural, which removes nearly the whole of the difficulty he thinks insurmountable.

As to the alleged Grecisms of Daniel, the charge seems to have been abandoned, even by advanced Neologists, since Coleridge wrote. When we have scarcely any Chaldee of that age remaining, the pretension to say that a particular phrase is not Chaldee is no slight presumption. Coleridge, doubtless, borrowed here on trust from some less scrupulous writer.

P. 56 (83). "As the general warmth to the informing light, even so is the predisposing Spirit to the revealing Word."

There is in this paragraph much that is beautiful and

true. But when reviewed in connexion with the main argument, it suggests some difficult inquiries. All truth cannot justly be expected to be received at once. There is an order to be observed in its reception, and a lawful condescension to ignorance or prejudice in its publication. The great truths of the Gospel might still be true, and even have been preserved in the world, if no New Testament Scriptures had been written. An infidel may be reasoned with on this ground: "You have no right to reject the great facts and doctrines of Christianity, because of supposed errors, on lesser points, in the word of God. The evidence of those facts, both historically and to the conscience, is clear and strong. But your rejection of them must involve three or four premises, some false, and all of them to you uncertain; that the supposed errors are real, and not the result of misconception; that all the Scriptures openly profess to be written under plenary and verbal inspiration; and that the texts, which seem to claim this for the whole or particular parts, are not among the minor errors. Till you have weighed the main doctrines in a reverent spirit, you cannot be sure of any of these premises, on which you secretly ground your own unbelief. Hence you must be inexcusable in rejecting Christianity for such reasons."

The Apostle sometimes speaks "after the manner of men;" and so may we also, when the occasion requires it, without any sacrifice of truth. But this accommodation to weak faith or strong prejudice by no means requires us to resign our own convictions. We must not and ought not to believe less ourselves, that others may believe

more than they now do. Yet, in reasoning with them, we have to keep in mind the right order of thought, and not to oppress those with strong meat, who can hardly endure and digest even "the sincere milk of the word."

The passage, however, is rather a development of Coleridge's own views than a mere condescension to the doubts of a sceptical mind. The subject then becomes one of great delicacy. It turns on the difference between two kinds of imperfection, that of a fallible penman, or the perfect condescension of a Divine message to the wants and weakness of those to whom it is sent. Coleridge maintains the former; the latter is the more Scriptural view which he condemns. But he forgets how much even the latter implies. A revelation to men cannot be the same as one to angels. Its perfection requires it to be, in one sense, imperfect; as the perfection of our Lord's work of redeeming mercy required Him to become a man of sorrows. The message must stoop to human language, sympathies, and intelligence. And since every part has its own immediate as well as final purpose, such a message to Jews, by a Jewish prophet, must have a different tone and character from one to Christian believers by an Apostle of Christ. But the Divine wisdom may be as really, even when less conspicuously exercised, in the form and vehicle as in the substance of the message. To vary slightly Coleridge's own metaphor,—we read of no thorns or husks on the tree of life (Prov. iii. 13. 18), and yet, along with the excellence of its fruits, "the *leaves* of the tree are for the healing of the nations" (Rev. xxii. 2). Let us take

the fruit to denote the inner and spiritual truth, and the leaves the outward clothing, the protecting drapery it assumes, human in appearance, but also really Divine; and the metaphor he has chosen well describes the true doctrine of inspiration. Assuredly the leaves have withered, and the fruit itself is left exposed to serious injury, when, as in this paragraph, the Bible, in theology, is placed on the same level with the works of Lord Bacon in physical science.

P. 57 (83, 84). "If I should reason thus—but why do I say *if?*—I have reasoned thus with more than the serious and well-disposed sceptic, and what was the answer? '*You* speak rationally, but seem to forget the subject. I have frequently attended meetings of the Bible Society, where I have heard speakers of every denomination, Calvinist and Arminian, Quaker and Methodist, Dissenting ministers and Clergymen, nay, dignitaries of the Established Church; and still I have heard the same doctrine, that the Bible was not to be regarded or reasoned about in the way that other good books are or may be; that the Bible was different in kind, and stood by itself. By some, indeed, this doctrine was implied rather than expressed, but yet evidently implied. But by far the greater number it was asserted, in the strongest and most unqualified words that language could supply. What is more, their principal arguments were grounded on the position that the Bible throughout was dictated by Omniscience, and therefore, in all its parts, infallibly true and obligatory; and that the men whose names are prefixed, were, in fact, but as different pens in the hand of

one and the same writer, and the words, the words of God himself; and that on this account all notes and comments were superfluous, nay, presumptuous, a profane mixing of human with Divine, the notions of fallible creatures with the Oracles of Infallibility; as if God's meaning could be so clearly or fitly expressed in man's as in God's own words! But how often you yourself must have heard that same language from the pulpit!' What could I reply to this? I could neither deny the fact, nor evade the conclusion that such is at present the popular belief."

A true doctrine may often be plausibly assailed through the errors of its advocates. The shrewd reply of Coleridge to the sceptic may be retorted on himself: "Surely it is beneath you to reject [the doctrine of plenary inspiration], on the score of rash conclusions, which other men think fit to include in their idea of it."

Truth, like the God of truth, must be sought "in due order" (1 Chron. xv. 13). The doctrine of plenary inspiration, on a platform of twenty sects, if they are real contrasts of creed and doctrine, and not minor diversities of discipline only, is too much like a Popish relic set up to be worshipped. It is precious when it belongs to the living man; but if saved from the corpse of a decaying faith, it becomes little more than an unseemly idol. What is the worth of having certain infallible truth *in* the Bible, if no certain truth, or almost none, can be gained *from* it? But the greater the discord, the lower the amount of certain truth actually attained. In such a case, when many sects, loud and clamorous in their hostility and mutual contradictions, still maintain the plenary in-

spiration of the Bible, it is like a man's coat of mail upon a dwarf, burdensome and unnatural. The doctrine becomes grotesque, and almost absurd, when dissevered from a full creed, and constant steady growth in Divine knowledge. If it can be retained in a chaos of sectarianism, it must be as a lifeless relic. Still it is a memorial of better things, and serves to humble those who profess to receive it, as being "dwindled sons of little men." A dwarf would be ridiculous in the armour of Achilles. The doctrine then reveals its real value, when we are seeking truth, and have begun to find and prize it in every corner of the Divine word. Our Lord's assurance then becomes a strength and guide, that "the Scripture cannot be broken," and that "one jot or tittle can in no wise pass from the law until all be fulfilled."

How false and imperfect a view of the doctrine it is that the sacred writers were merely pens, has been shown already. That notes and comments are superfluous and presumptuous is another falsehood, a conclusion drawn from it without the least real warrant. The perfection of Scripture is perfection for a special purpose, and chiefly as a record of facts, and a standard of appeal in all matters of religious doctrine. Now this really implies the need of oral teaching, and also of notes and comments, which are only another form of the same ordinance—the ministry of the word. The opposite notion, whoever may have held it, is false and even absurd. While it affects to magnify the Scriptures, it flatly contradicts them. In order to exalt them as the *only means* of attaining truth,

it begins by imputing to them direct falsehood, since the need and importance of an oral and personal ministry is one of their plainest doctrines.

The antithesis at the close between man's words and God's words is perplexing only at first sight. The question might be answered by another—Can you see best by the late twilight or by moonlight? Surely by the latter, though less directly from the sun. One perfection of the record, viewed with reference to its special design, is its mystery and partial obscurity. It has parts where the lamb may wade, and depths where the elephant may swim. "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing," and the Scriptures are a field in which heavenly treasure is hidden. The words of a wise teacher, or thoughtful divine, are means appointed for bringing to light, for those who require them, the pearls of their deeper mysteries. Among the ends for which they were given are these: to awaken curiosity, exercise wisdom, and also to manifest Christian love, and the mutual dependence of all parts of the mystical body of Christ.

P. 58 (85). "It cannot but be beneath a wise man to be an infidel on the score of what other men think fit to include in their Christianity."

The remark is pointed and happy. But while it is a forcible reply to such an infidel, it cannot prove that Coleridge includes as much as he ought in his view of inspiration. His own figure in the next page is a witness against himself. If many a stick, that once seemed to him dry and sapless, has become, with riper faith, an Aaron's rod, and blossomed with almonds; surely it is safer and wiser, even

where still perplexed, to believe that this would be true, with still further insight, in the case of the few that still seem lifeless, rather than to pare down and lower all the statements of God's word as to its own perfection of truth. How does he fail to observe that he has cut up the roots of his own argument? For what is his confession? Once many parts of Scripture seemed to be only withered sticks, and with the growth of light one after another has "budded and yielded almonds." To his vision, now grown clearer than of old, very few of these dry ones remain. But here he turns round sharply upon us, and seems quite positive that these few are really lifeless. He will not believe that, after his toilsome ascent, even he may have a few steps to climb, before he reaches the mountain-top where his eyes shall be fully purged "with euphrasy and rue." No, these branches are and must be withered for ever, and it is vain for any one to think that these too may blossom in their turn. Better do violence to fifty or a hundred texts, than imagine that, with still deeper insight, every jot and tittle of the Divine word may be found to share in the life, which has been found by experience to belong very nearly to the whole. Surely the opposite view is not only simpler and safer, but nobler and more hopeful, and even the most natural inference from the previous steps of his own experience.

P. 59 (86). The real controversy here is not as to the right order of the progress, but as to the true end of the journey. From an implicit faith in Scripture, the result of education, to the clear discernment of Divine truth and wisdom in every part, the distance is great, almost

immense. Still, the first is a help towards attaining the last. But then it must not be thrust forward unduly, or lifted out of its right place. It is not so much a part of the Christian faith itself as a fence and barrier around it. When it is held, however blindly, it may not be rashly set aside; but much wisdom may be needed before those who hold it can rise into the full manhood of faith. For this end the vital doctrines of Scripture need ever to be kept in the foreground. When these have been inwrought into the soul, there will be a hunger and thirst for righteousness, and for that word which is the food of heart-righteousness, and thus a deeper sense, daily, of its preciousness and power. Its statements respecting its own Divine source, instead of causing scruples, will then be echoed by a secret instinct of faith. We may thank Coleridge for setting his sceptic friends on the right road. Our only quarrel with him is when he would persuade them to rest satisfied a little more than half-way on their spiritual journey, and even turns back a little way himself for the pleasure of their company.

The description of the advance, p. 59 (86), is just and beautiful. Doctrines true and useful in themselves may, through some misconception, be hurtful for a time, and hinder the acceptance of other truths. The Mosaic system needed thus to be broken up for the spread of the Gospel. And so, in some cases, perhaps, the doctrine of plenary inspiration may hinder the progress of a restless, earnest inquirer, struggling upwards to the light. It may be useful, hypothetically, to lay it aside, and trace out truth with earnest freedom, as if the Scriptures were

honest, but not wholly inspired records. But as the Gospel will issue in the "receiving of Israel," which will even be "life from the dead;" so that very inquiry, pursued to its close, must lead to the recovery of the truth that had been laid aside for a time, with a Shechinah bathing it in glory. Read in the light of superstition, or of a naturalizing theology, the doctrine of inspiration may be like the mortal body, a drag on the spirit within. But read in the light of mature faith, it becomes a resurrection body, a beautiful garment in which the truth will stand arrayed for ever.

P. 60 (87). It would be heathenish love to a friend to prize his bodily presence to such a degree as to maintain that without a body his soul would be a mere breath and perish. And it is a spurious honour to that revealed word of God, whose essence and inner life is the Gospel, to affirm that with no Scripture fully and verbally inspired, there could have been no Christian Revelation. But still the picture of Coleridge is slightly overdrawn. When we trace the actual course of Christianity, while attended by this inspired record, we may well affirm that its pilgrimage in such a world as ours, as a bodiless apparition, would have been full of peril; and it would have required no common miracle of love and wisdom to keep it from utter extinction and death. The candlestick of the Church would have burned very dimly, perhaps have been quenched in darkness, if these two olive-trees of God had not continually supplied their sacred oil to feed and sustain the light.

The statement about the *quod semper* maxim is far too

strong. Apply it to the Church visible, as it has been applied to the Scriptures, and almost nothing will be left for us to believe. The maxim is one of the most foolish ever devised, unless we expound it so loosely that it ceases to be a maxim at all. Coleridge may perhaps only mean that in every age there has been a body of sound divines who, amidst minor varieties of thought, have held strongly all the great truths of our religion, and that we may, by a steady and patient eye, trace this stream of truth from age to age, so that even in the absence of Scripture, we might thus obtain all the knowledge needful to our salvation. This is an important truth, and tends to clear our reverence for Scripture from that superstitious perversion, in which we are ready to slay living prophets, and then to garnish their sepulchres. For what can be a closer parallel, than to treat as hopeless the attainment of any certainty, what truths are really taught in the Bible, and to praise it in the same breath as pure truth without mixture of error? Thus, in a practical sense, we slay and extinguish the living truth, and then adorn the sepulchre, because of the lifeless corpse of truth that lies buried within.

P. 6 (187 f). "What you find therein coincident with your own pre-established convictions, you will of course recognize as the revealed word."

If the sceptic friend, through the help of the new theory, learns to receive only what coincides with his "pre-established convictions," he will have received a very doubtful benefit. Here is the peril of this lax theology, that it submits the Scripture to the judgment of

the sinner's dim-sighted reason, instead of "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

P. 61 (188). "Thenceforward your doubts will be confined to such parts or passages of the received Canon, as seem to you irreconcilable with known truths, and at variance with the tests given in the Scriptures themselves," &c.

The words "as seem to you," give here a very wide latitude. They are, however, much limited by the clauses that follow, assuming only that the further examination is carried on in an honest and reverent spirit. It is no proof of a strong faith, never to have felt doubts, or seen difficulties. The real error of Coleridge's remark, and of the whole work, lies perhaps in this point. Because a credulous and superstitious spirit may gulp down at once, in words, the doctrine of plenary and verbal inspiration, without pausing one moment to dwell on its manifold and weighty consequences, or really believing even the first letters of the Christian faith, he confounds an advancing, but still very imperfect stage of progress in the apprehension of Divine truth, and of the wisdom of Scripture, with the right creed and final attainment of the Christian believer. The closing sentences may be adopted with one important substitution: "The result will be, a confidence in the deep wisdom of the revealing Spirit of God, increased only by the apparent exceptions." The fact is clear, that some passages of Scripture, taken alone, are very open to perversion; just as in the best and noblest music, some bars or passages, taken alone, may contain a frightful discord. One reason for this is doubtless what

Coleridge here suggests under a beautiful figure, when he speaks of those who would "rend the Urim and Thummim from the breastplate of judgment, and frame oracles by private divination from each letter of each disjointed gem." The Spirit of God would constrain us to study the whole word of God, and to study it with a practical aim and in a reverent spirit. To the Jews that one saying of our Lord, "Destroy this temple," &c., might well be as great a stumbling-block, as the blessings of Deborah or the cursings of David to men like Coleridge, whose piety is more benevolent than profound. Yet these very words strengthened the faith of the true disciples, who were prepared to believe that every word of their Lord must be wise and true. All Scripture needs to be expounded according to "the analogy of faith." If persons will rend it asunder, and "frame oracles by divination from each letter of each disjointed gem," it may be one proof of the perfection of the inspired word, that it is so formed as to frustrate and disappoint the profane attempt. It is given "πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως," in order that it may quicken spiritual diligence; and its truths will open to us with deeper interest, and with intenser power, when we see in them not only the gift of God, but the blessed fruit and gracious recompense of our own assiduous and patient inquiry.

Let. V. p. 63 (89). "Yes, my dear friend, it is my conviction, that in all ordinary cases the knowledge and belief of the Christian Religion should precede the study of the Hebrew Canon."

It does so in the case of those whose views you

condemn. I never heard of the most thorough "Bible Christian," who would set a child to study the Canon as its first lesson of Christian instruction. The practical contrast is not at all such as your words imply. But is it not better that a child should be set at once to "learn and inwardly digest" the true sayings of God, without being taught or encouraged to suspect, from the first, that some of them may prove to be only "false sayings of men?" An explicit and mature faith in the inspiration of every book of Scripture, and of every part. as we have it now, could only be the fruit of persevering thought and study, and of Christian knowledge in its ripeness and perfection. But an implicit faith, such as Christian children usually gain from pious parents, though widely different from the other, is a vast negative gain. It saves countless distractions in the acquisition of Divine truth, and shuts the door, at least for a time, against many heresies and delusions. Still it can hardly pass into the other and higher kind of faith, by a spiritual resurrection, without a season of death. In thoughtful minds there will usually be a stage of inquiry, when the truth, first obtained through implicit faith in Scripture, having ripened in the conscience, becomes in its turn a test for the Scriptures themselves; just as light may be used to test the healthiness or disease of the human eye, though it is only by means of the eye that the light has been discerned. The features of this middle stage may vary widely, according to the relative intensity of feeling, or fulness of truth previously attained. Where a few main truths only have been learned, but these are held

vividly, the effect will be as in these "Confessions." Along with the full reception and hearty love of those truths, there may be a readiness to discard parts of Scripture, because the range of truth accepted is not full or wide enough to secure a just appreciation of the whole. There may then be strong Christian faith in the citadel of the soul, but scepticism may lodge in its battlements, or lurk in its outskirts. In other cases, the range of truth apprehended may be wider, but the apprehension of each part be very feeble. The transition may then reveal no such symptoms of partial incredulity, but too often will be imperfect. Faith in the Scriptures, though formally more complete, may really be more defective and impure, through want of that intense life of truth in the soul, which alone can blend all parts of the Divine message into their true moral harmony. No part will be rejected; but many errors, alien from the *spirit* of the word of God, may keep an undisturbed lodgment in the soul.

The healthiest form, perhaps, of the transition, is midway between these. It is when the implicit faith of the child in the word of God, as one complete whole, is never abandoned; but when, also, there is such energy of faith in its central truths, as will not rest content while any moral contradiction of them even seems to be sheltered under an authority so holy and divine. Difficulties will then be examined, one by one, as they arise, with firm faith that a solution does exist; but also with a settled purpose not to speak deceitfully for God, and rather to pause and confess our own ignorance than offer explana-

tions which find no response in the conscience and heart, and run counter to the true laws of Divine morality. Those who blame strongly the partial scepticism in minds of the first class, will often do well to ask whether it is not the feeble hold they have themselves on every part of God's truth, which spares them the perplexities almost inseparable from a faith, limited in its range, but vigorous and deep within those limits. The word of God is one vast problem to the thoughtful believer. Those who have never felt any thing perplexing in its message can never have grasped its main truths in all their living power. And those, again, who are content to explain its difficulties by contradicting its own outlines of faith, or maxims of goodness, are really further from the ripeness of Christian wisdom than some of those whose partial laxity they condemn, and perhaps are less likely to discover their own defect. But still each alike is a defect, and a dishonour to the revealing Spirit of God.

"To make the Bible, apart from the truths, doctrines, and spiritual experiences contained therein, one subject of a special article of faith, I hold an unnecessary and useless abstraction."

True, the Bible, "apart from the truths contained in it." But not "the Bible, in connexion with one great truth it contains," namely, that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God," and that "one jot or tittle shall not pass from the law till all be fulfilled."

"Who shall dare," it is asked, "to dissolve or loosen this holy bond, this Divine reciprocity of faith and

Scripture? Who shall dare enjoin aught else as an object of saving faith, besides the truths that appertain to salvation?" But this truth *does* appertain to salvation, though not in the first, yet in the second order. It is not well to exalt it into the first place, as an essential of Christian faith. But neither is it wise or safe to thrust it below its real place, as the main shield to that faith against the inroads of delusion, the phial wherein is treasured the one Divine test, whereby we are to discern truth from error, and light from darkness.

"The imposers take on them a heavy responsibility, however defensible the opinion itself, as an opinion, may be."

Here Coleridge seems to adopt the Popish conceit about truth *de fide*, and not *de fide*. But it is rotten at the core. Faith, saving faith, is not the acceptance of one or two, or ten or twelve truths, specially, to the neglect of all others. It is a habit of mind which may be described as "a welcoming of God's truth into the soul." The degrees of truth proposed may vary widely, and still there may be saving faith. On the other hand, the rejection of any truth of God is an act of unbelief; and so far as its influence extends, dims and blights the faith in all the rest, because it reverses that habit of soul in which faith has its life and essence. An opinion, as an opinion, is worth little or nothing. It may increase the prudence of the outward actions, but can add nothing to the life of the soul. Truth must be fully and cordially embraced, and then it becomes spirit and life. No mere opinion is or can be harmless. If false, it is pernicious from its

falsehood; if true, it is harmful, because it is an opinion merely, and not a firm and solid faith. In either case it implies a sin of infirmity, and a token that the soul is not yet "filled with the fulness of God." A measure of this infirmity is unavoidable in the progress of the soul's redemption from perfect ignorance and moral blindness to the perfect knowledge of the pure in heart, who see God. But to be willing that a truth should be held as an opinion, if only it be nothing more than an opinion, is a fatal error, destructive of real progress, and of all deep reverence for truth as truth.

Two questions are very distinct—What we ought to believe, as established Christians? and in what order should truth be presented to perplexed and sceptical minds? Remarks may be most true and wise, in reference to the second question, and perilously false when applied to the first. Besides, no management can avoid the real difficulty. The texts where the Scriptures speak of themselves, that is, the later of the earlier, as the word of God, are so numerous and plain, that the sceptic cannot and will not fail to observe them. We ought not, indeed, to set difficulties too early before him. But still less should we make them insurmountable when they arise, and betray the cause of revealed truth, by owning that they are real, and not apparent only. Our answer ought rather to assume the following hypothetical form:—"Assuming for a moment," we may say, "that the sixty-two books are in every part a revelation from the Infinitely Wise to a world of sinners, given at intervals through two thousand years, and designed for

every age, nation, and character, revealing alike the events of past and future ages, the plainest lessons of duty, and deepest mysteries of Providence, is it natural, possible, or reasonable, that they should not contain many things which, at first sight, are difficult and hard to understand? Could they proceed from the God of Nature, or the God of Providence, if all were clear, easy, and consistent, at the first glance, to worms of the earth, to children of the dust?"

Let. VI. p. 67 (92).

To assume that any view is held merely to avert certain consequences, is really to assume that it is not held sincerely, and that its advocates do not believe in its truth. Now to maintain the full inspiration of the Scriptures, if we do not really believe it, would be profane and wicked. The attempt to exclude heresies by lying and hypocrisy, would be a sure way to introduce and multiply them. But while every truth ought to be held on its own direct evidence, the evil results of an error are a lawful motive for deepening our aversion. The contrast in this case may be overstated. If we are to believe that all Scripture is inspired, and still are encouraged to think every creed that has ever pretended to be derived from it equally plausible, we are little forwarder than if we are left free to discard any portion at our pleasure. The real difference is that, so long as the doctrine of plenary inspiration is held, it needs a more violent strain on the conscience for serious heresies to find entrance. And the practical result is most serious; for, however little Coleridge may reject, the same principle of a purely subjec-

tive test will warrant others in rejecting much, and an immoral infidel in casting aside nearly the whole. For what is the principle? The varying degree of moral attainment in each Christian is to be the test by which he decides how much is, and how much is not, Divine. Coleridge may receive nearly all, but others, following the same elastic rule, might reject nearly all. And this kind of selection tends also to nourish intellectual pride, both in what is received, and what is rejected. In one we find a proof of our spiritual attainments, and in the other of our superior judgment, compared with those unhappy Bibliolaters who receive all on trust. This is neither healthy nor safe, and must lead to countless evils.

The antithesis that follows, p. 68 (93), like many others, is deceptive. It is really this—Are we to receive the Bible from its external evidence, or from the moral? The true answer is, From neither alone, but from both combined. To receive it wholly from external evidence leads to a blind, dark superstition, which mistakes shadows due to its own darkness for the hues and colours of the Divine message. Receive it only for its moral evidence, and your own conscience sits in judgment, as a superior, on the words and messages of the living God. The diseased palate is made the test of the medicine designed for its own cure. The proud heart tries, by its own pride, the precepts of humility; the pigmy reason, by its own littleness, the plans and counsels of the All-wise. The evils of an opposite extreme do not prove that such a course is not also full of peril, and fraught with evil.

Neither alternative here offered is a safe and wise course, but one equally distinct from both. Three or four truths need to be successively applied. First, the Bible, in its plainest truths and general character, commends itself to the conscience as good, holy, and gracious; and therefore contains, either purely or impurely presented, a real revelation (morally) of truth. Secondly, it comes to us with external evidence, clear as to the main portions, that it is a supernatural revelation, or at least contains and records messages from God. Thirdly, the Bible affirms its own inspired character, and one part of it bears witness to another that the Spirit of God is its true and secret Author. Finally, all analogy leads us to suppose that a message so various, from the God of all wisdom to sinful creatures, must contain some things hard to be understood, and perhaps harder to receive. To copy Coleridge's Pentad, perhaps rather curious and fantastic in its form, the *Prothesis* is, substantial goodness *in* the Scriptures, truth that commends itself to the conscience of men. The *Thesis* is the external evidence that such books are a part of the Canon; and the *Antithesis*, the external evidence of Nature and Providence to the presence of mystery and difficulties in all things truly Divine. The *Mesothesis* is the witness of the Scriptures, each to other, and one to all, that they are the word of God. The *Synthesis* is the plenary inspiration of the whole. The other parts, robbed of the Prothesis, lead to midnight superstition; and the Prothesis, stripped of the rest, would leave us floating in the mists of Neology. From the union of all there will spring

a faith, hearty and intelligent, reverent and discriminating; while implicit reverence to the whole transforms itself daily into reverence and love for every part, when it has been found to be life and spirit to the whole being. But it must be most pernicious to make the fallen conscience the sole judge whether every part answers or not to our conceptions of a perfect Divine message. There is a Decretal which reads: "The Books of the Old and New Testament are to be received, because there seems to be a decree of holy Pope Innocent (i. e., the founder of the Inquisition) in their favour!" Is it not a close parallel to say, Such and such parts of them are to be received, because there seems to be a decretal of that holy pope, my own conscience, in its favour? To receive them, in short, without any reference to their moral features, is superstition; but to make our moral sense, the healing of which is one main object of them, the sufficient test of any part, is presumptuous madness.

P. 68 (93), *note*. "It is remarkable that both parties might appeal to the same text, 2 Tim. iii. 16," &c.

Both might appeal to the text, but one appeal would be truth, the other little better than open folly. For, first, there is no difference of reading, or none worth notice. Not one manuscript in Griesbach or Bengel omits the copula, and the versions are often a slight paraphrase, and no presumption for a different reading. And next, the received text really admits of only one sense. For the word γραφὴ is never used in the New Testament for a *writing* in the abstract, but always for

a passage of Holy Writ. In fifty cases not one exception is found. And not only the usage, but common sense requires the same version. What could be more unmeaning than to say, All those parts of the Canon which God has inspired are also profitable? Further, not only common sense, but the context, enforces the same conclusion. The writings of the Canon have already been styled collectively, *τὰ ἱερὰ γράμματα, the holy writings.* These Timothy had known from his childhood, and not merely some vague extracts, or "genuine fragments" mingled with uninspired rubbish, but the Old Testament as known to the Jews. Having already called the whole *ἱερὰ γράμματα,* the Apostle changes the term, and asserts that *πᾶσα γραφὴ,* that is, every text or part of those sacred writings, is inspired of God. This reasoning seems decisive. Because *γράμματα* is a general term, St. Paul adds an epithet to confine it to the Scriptures. But the other term, in the idiom of the New Testament, of itself denotes the Scriptures only. He employs it, then, in its known meaning; and by the prefix, *πᾶσα,* affirms that every passage of those holy writings, known to Timothy, is inspired, and because inspired, profitable also.

The second class of versions quoted are merely ambiguous, and admit the true sense just as naturally as the other. To be a witness for Coleridge's view, the Vulgate should have been, "Quæcunque Scriptura divinitus est inspirata, etiam utilis est." The version of Calmet requires the sense of our own translators, and the article excludes the other. Tertullian's words strongly favour

the same view, "Legimus omnem Scripturam, ædificationi habilem, Divinitus inspirari." Origen's, though slightly ambiguous, are more naturally construed in the same way. The external and internal evidence is equally decisive for the rendering of our common version, and the tone of every quotation in St. Paul's Epistles fully proves it to be the true meaning of the Apostle.

Pp. 69—71 (94—96). "In every generation, and wherever the light of Revelation has shone, men of all ranks, conditions, and states of mind have found in this volume a correspondent for every movement towards the Better felt in their own hearts. The needy soul has found supply, the feeble a help, the sorrowful a comfort; yea, be the recipiency the least that can consist with moral life, there is an answering grace ready to enter. The Bible has been found a spiritual world, spiritual, and at the same time outward and common to all. You in one place, I in another, all men somewhere, and at some time, meet with an assurance that the hopes and fears, the thoughts and yearnings that proceed from, or tend to, a right spirit in us, are not dreams, nor voices heard in sleep, or spectres which the eye suffers but not perceives. As if on some dark night a pilgrim, suddenly beholding a bright star moving before him, should stop in fear and perplexity. But lo! traveller after traveller passes by him, and each being questioned whither he is going, makes answer, 'I am following yon guiding star.' The pilgrim quickens his steps, and presses onward in confidence. More confident still will he be, if by the wayside he should find, here and there, ancient monuments, each

with its notice lamp, and on each the name of some former pilgrim, and a record that there he had begun to follow the benignant star.

"No otherwise is it with the varied contents of the sacred volume. The hungry have found food, the thirsty a living spring, the feeble a staff, and the victorious ever purer songs of welcome and strains of music; and as long as each man asks on account of his wants, and asks what he wants, no man will discover aught amiss or deficient in the many-chambered storehouse. But if, instead of this, an idler or a scoffer should wander through the ruins, peering and peeping, either detects, or fancies he has detected, here a rusted sword or pointless staff, there a tool of rude construction, and superseded by later improvements, and preserved, perhaps, to make us more grateful for them; which of two things will a sober-minded man, who from his childhood upward had been fed, clothed, armed, and furnished with the means of instruction from this very magazine, think the fitter plan? Will he insist that the rust is not rust, or a rust *sui generis*, intentionally formed on the steel for some mysterious virtue, and that the staff and astrolabe of a slippered astronomer are identical with the quadrant and telescope of Newton or Herschel? Or will he not rather give the curious inquisitor the joy of his mighty discoveries, and the credit of them for his reward?"

All here is beautiful, while Coleridge dwells with bright eloquence on the excellence of the Divine Word. The truth sparkles with life, when it flows from the heart's

fountains, which that word has purified by its heavenly power. Where then does weakness enter, and tame down admiration and honour into lame and timorous defence? "If an idler or scoffer, peering and prying, either detects, or fancies that he has detected, rusted sword, or pointless shaft," &c. The two alternatives are not the same. Reality and erring fancy may be wide as the poles asunder. Why prefer the fancies of a peering scoffer to the eye of that great Architect who provided the ample storehouse, and taught you to use its stores, and who assures you that one purpose of it is to cure your dimness of vision, and to anoint your eyes with eye-salve, that you may see wondrous things in the word of God? Whatever your dim eyes, or the dimmer eyes of the scoffer, may think they see, "all Scripture is inspired of God, and profitable." If we receive the witness of men, nay, even of scoffers and sceptics, surely "the witness of God is greater," and "this is the witness of God, which He has testified" of the excellence of the written word.

"Will he insist that rust is not rust?" Metaphors are not argument. Even when employed in a wrong cause, they are deserters which the voice of Truth can summon back to her own standard. Since our Lord opened the eyes of the blind man with spittle and clay, who shall assure us that what the scoffer "fancies" to be rust, even were it such really, being found in these God-inspired Scriptures, has no Divine and healing virtue? The humble means employed in that miracle were surely the parable of a wider truth. Parts of the

Divine message, in appearance trivial, useless, or unworthy, may yet, when received in faith, be found to be endued with healing and enlightening power.

P. 73. "A few parts may be discovered of less costly materials, or inferior workmanship."

It is no true inference from the inspiration of all Scripture, that every truth it reveals, and every part of the revelation, is equally important. Scripture itself teaches just the reverse. As there are ranks and orders of dignity among the holy angels, why not also among heaven-derived truths? Some faithful sayings the Holy Spirit has expressly singled out as of primary worth. The tabernacle was all made after a celestial pattern, but some of its materials were "less costly" than others, and probably some parts of less finished workmanship. Still every part answered to a Divine pattern. In a revelation to men, the pure and heavenly truth must stoop down to us, and why not stoop lower in some parts than in others? There is a wide difference between the Books of Nehemiah and of Revelation, and still both may be entirely divine.

The whole paragraph, as an appeal to the sceptic, is beautiful and true. It is a cumulative argument from the experience of ages. The inquiry, however, is not into the best mode of dealing with an infidel, but what ought to be our own faith as Christians. And here the nature of the contrast is entirely changed. One question is of this kind: Ought a few minor difficulties, and even errors, granting them to be such. to outweigh the numerous proofs of moral excellence and spiritual power in

the Scriptures, viewed as a whole, when these have been attested by the experience of the wisest and best of men in so many ages of the world? In the latter case, the question is this: Ought difficulties few and small, which have diminished confessedly with every step in the growth of spiritual light, to outweigh the many full declarations, that all Scripture, or each part in its turn, is the inspired word of God, on the truth of which we may safely rely? Is it more reasonable to assume that our last step has brought us to the perfection of spiritual insight, or that the words of St. Paul, and of our Lord himself, are unreservedly true? Stripped of metaphors, this is the one real question, and it is amazing that such a mind as Coleridge can strive laboriously to make his readers accept the former alternative, and to dismiss the last as a vain superstition.

The questions that follow, p. 73, are a direct disproof of the alarming results which Coleridge assigns to the doctrine he condemns. For if the maxim of expounding separate parts by the spirit of the whole leads to the same practical conclusion, it must be folly to renounce the usual faith of the Church, and contradict St. Paul, on the ground of the ill consequences that else must follow.

But the practical conclusion is not the same. For while the sound maxim of interpreting individual parts by the spirit of the whole will secure us from a superstitious perversion of particular texts, the maxim that some parts, distinguishable by no outward sign from the rest, are uninspired, sets us free to follow our own fan-

cies whenever we please, instead of the word of God. On one principle we have a double safeguard against error, the letter of the text, and the spirit of the context, or the analogy of all Scripture. On the other we have no check whatever. The moment a passage displeases our taste, or crosses our theory, we have only to pronounce it "rust," or "a pointless shaft"—froth thrown up by the fermentation of life in its lower stages, an accommodation, a tradition, an apologue, a fancy, or an anachronism, or that prophecy is "pretended history," in fact, whatever device we please, and the difficulty is at an end. We are left free to be unbelievers by piecemeal, and it is well if we, or perhaps our children, do not end by becoming infidels complete.

We may trace the effects of this elastic principle by earnests supplied to us even in the present day. Coleridge accounts the history of the Fall a mere allegory. Niebuhr and some of his followers describe the early Books of Genesis and Exodus as myths, like the Roman legends out of which he has sought to extract real history. The Books from Joshua to Chronicles are of course taken as uninspired, except some prophetic messages in them. Again, the Song of Deborah, the Book of Job, Esther, Canticles, the Book of Daniel, except "perhaps a few genuine fragments," are excluded by Coleridge, Arnold, Pye Smith, from the inspired Canon. In the New Testament, if no book is wholly and absolutely excluded, still between accommodations, Jewish fancies, anachronisms, trivial errors, reasonings based solely on prejudice and popular opinion, there will be little left of

solid footing. *Facilis descensus Averni.* When once we have sacrificed the literal truth of repeated sayings of God to the fancied infallibility of our own discernment, it is impossible to say where the mischief will end. The soundness of Coleridge in many great matters only makes it more grievous that he should throw the weight of his authority into the scale, which, to thousands, may lead on in its descent to the worst delusions, and even to spiritual death.

Pp. 74, 75 (98—100). "To assert and to demand miracles without necessity was the vice of the unbelieving Jews of old, and from the Rabbis and the Talmudists the infection has spread. . . . But all the miracles which the legends of monk and rabbi contain can scarcely be put in competition, on the score of complication, inexplicableness, the absence of all intelligible use or purpose, and of wanton self-frustration, with those that must be assumed by the maintainers of this doctrine, in order to give effect to the series of miracles by which all the nominal composers of the Hebrew nation before the time of Ezra, of whom there are any remains, were successively transformed into automaton compositors, so that the original text should be, in sentiment, image, word, syntax, and composition, an exact impression of the Divine copy! In common consistency the theologians who impose this belief on their fellow-Christians ought to insist equally on the superhuman origin and authority of the Masora."

This passage and what follows is more like superficial railing than solid argument. The doctrine itself is

strangely misstated and travestied. No one of sense and piety believes that Isaiah, David, or St. Paul, was a mere automaton in writing the Holy Scriptures. They were φερόμενοι ὑπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου, "borne along by the Holy Ghost;" so that while they had full sympathy with the message, and their understanding was in full exercise, as conscious agents and ministers of the word, they were under a power which guided their thoughts and directed their words, so as to secure a record of Divine truth suited for every age.

But the miracle is "complicated." So is every miracle whatever,—God, man, and nature all conspire in it. It was very complicated, when God said to Moses, "Stretch out thy rod over the sea," and Moses stretched it out, the east wind blew, and the waters became a wall on the right hand and on the left. No motion of a rod would naturally cause an east wind, no east wind naturally make the waters like a wall, or "congeal" the depths in the midst of the seas. There was the voice of God, the action of Moses, the motion of his rod, the blast of the east wind, the congealing of the waters. How complicated the process! how simple and sublime the result! The body is one complication, the soul is another, and the union of both more complicated and more wonderful still! Why darken counsel by an objection which one glance at the human body ought to prove worthless?

But it is "inexplicable." What then? "Canst thou by searching find out God?" So far, however, as it is useful to understand it, it may be readily explained and

illustrated, and the words of 2 Pet. i. 21 are a sufficient key to any simple mind.

It is charged, next, with "absence of all use and purpose." Of no use, in a world of error and darkness, to have a sure guide, a message of truth without error, to be a light to our feet amidst snares and pitfalls! The voice of ten thousand believers in the first ages, and of tens of thousands in the present day, condemns and disproves the assertion. What privilege higher than to have access to a fountain of pure unmingled truth? an oracle, living oracles, where God speaks to us in every variety of tone, from gentle whispers, suited to the ear of children, to that voice of many waters and mighty thunderings, before which archangels are silent with awe, and tremble and adore!

What follows is mere trifling. God has told us that "all Scripture is inspired," and that it "cannot be broken." And the reply is, We cannot believe this, unless inspired versions are provided us in every language, or unless others undertake to believe this without warrant.

P. 75 (100). "But I am weary of discussing a tenet which the generality of divines, and the leaders of the religious public have ceased to defend, and yet continue to assert or imply. The tendency manifested in this conduct, the spirit in which not indeed the tenet itself, but the obstinate adherence to it against the clearest light of reason and experience, is grounded, that it is which, according to my conviction, gives venom to the error, and justifies the attempt to substitute a juster

view. As long as it was the common and effective belief of all the Reformed Churches, that by the good Spirit were the spirits tried, and that the light which beams forth from the written word was its own evidence for the children of light; as long as Christians considered their Bible as a plenteous entertainment, where every guest, duly called and attired, found the food needful and fitting for him, and where each, beholding all around him glad and satisfied, praised the banquet, and thankfully glorified the Master of the feast; so long did the tenet that the Scriptures were written under the special impulse of the Holy Ghost remain safe and profitable. Nay, in the sense and with the feelings in which it was asserted, it was a truth, a truth to which every spiritual believer now and at all times will bear witness by virtue of his own experience. . . . And if they did not always duly distinguish the inspiration, the imbreathment of the pre-disposing and assisting Spirit from the revelation of the informing word, it was at worst a harmless hyperbole. It was holden by all that if the power of the Spirit from without furnished the text, the grace of the same Spirit from within must supply the comment."

The works of Gaussen and Hengstenberg, which appeared almost as soon as the "Confessions," and many others which have been written since, show the first sentence to be palpably untrue. I, too, am weary of replying to such empty declamation as Coleridge descends into in the previous paragraph. Here he ventures to say of the doctrine of plenary inspiration, as

held by the great body of the Fathers and the Reformed Divines, that it is against "the clearest light of reason." The clearest light! rather the sparks self-kindled by human pride (Isa. l. 2), with which all who compass themselves lie down in sorrow. When reason rejects the true sayings of God, it degenerates rapidly into thick moral darkness. Nothing can well be more unreasonable than the assumption on which the whole argument or invective rests. It is that the last step he has reached, when difficulties have melted away in every previous stage, is the pinnacle of wisdom; and that no further light would remove the few doubts or perplexities that remain, even though earlier progress has removed so many. And this, almost the height of unreasonableness, is here styled "the clearest light of reason."

The contrast that follows is hardly less strange. Does Coleridge, of all persons, mean to teach us that a great error may, for a time, be safe and profitable? Yet what else can he mean when he says, safe and profitable, nay, even a truth? If the doctrine was safe and profitable, it must have been true. If true then, it must be true now, unless we hold the bright idea that the Scriptures were inspired throughout three centuries ago, and that the scepticism of the last century has dis-inspired them! Without faith in the central truths of Scripture, no doubt faith in the hedge, the periphery, that is, their plenary inspiration, will profit very little. It will then be a superstition, a truth held in unrighteousness, and rather a tax on the reason than a strength and joy to the heart.

But which view is likely to be more correct—one held, as with the great Reformers, amidst the sunshine of faith? or one held by those who, like Coleridge, have emerged slowly, and with difficulty, out of the low fogs of Socinianism and Neology engendered in a sceptical age?

The contrast here drawn, and again p. 88, is not Scriptural nor just—that all supernatural revelation is from the Word or Son of God, and all ordinary grace and influence from the Holy Spirit. The antithesis is altogether baseless and unsound. For all supernatural revelation is not only by the Word, but through the Spirit. It was so in our Lord himself (Isa. lxi. 1. Lev. iv. 17—21), and in the Jewish prophets (Zech. vii. 12. 2 Pet. i. 21). In the New Testament, also, the miraculous gifts, the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge and *prophecy*, were "by the same Spirit" (1 Cor. xii. 8. 10). It was so too in the latest and fullest prophecy, the Book of Revelation (ch. i. 1. 10; xiv. 13; xvii. 3). Again, all ordinary grace is from Christ the Word, by the operation of the Spirit. Nay, the fullest statement of this truth is linked, not only with the person of Christ, but this very title—the Word (John i. 14. 16, 17). But while the contrast, as stated by Coleridge, is untrue, there is a true contrast, held by Christians in general, between regenerating and enlightening grace common to all Christians, and special or supernatural inspiration. Here there is, and is commonly held to be, a difference in kind. The difference is not in kind, but in manner and degree, between prophetic inspiration by voice, dream, and vision,

and the Apostolic, by the mighty inward working of the Spirit of God, the Spirit of heavenly wisdom.

P. 81 (104—106). "All men of learning . . . are not to be credited."

As an appeal to the infidel, all this paragraph is just and true. But as an implicit assumption that there are real disproofs of plenary inspiration, it is baseless. "See how the logic will look." David is recorded to have treated cruelly the people of Rabbah. Therefore the record is uninspired; for either it is not true, or else if the fact occurred, an inspired record would have concealed it. Three large round numbers in Chronicles are so large as to cause some doubt of their historical accuracy. Therefore the fault, if there be a fault, cannot be due to later copyists, though such numbers, 400,000 and 800,000, are of all things the most open to the entrance of such error. Or, again, our Lord refers His disciples to Daniel the prophet in explanation of his own prophecy. Therefore the book they ascribe to him, which contains the passage our Lord quoted, is a forgery of late origin. Or again, the Jews even now celebrate the feast of Purim, therefore the history of the event they celebrate is an eastern legend. This logic does not seem one whit better than that which Coleridge ridicules.

The testimony, p. 84 (107), "This I believe," &c., coming from such a mind, is weighty and important. But the better his own state and the further his progress, the greater the inconsistency of his creed. He has groped his way from the midnight of his early days, and finds himself, by morning light, within a stone's throw

of a city "with glistening spires and pinnacles adorned," lit up in every part with the beams of the Sun of Righteousness. But having approached so near, he is confident he has reached the true end of his journey, and losing patience to travel a few steps further, contends that the city has been built out of its place, too far to the north. The doctrine of inspiration, as taught by the consenting voice of Prophets and Apostles, must be lowered to suit the difficulties, not of the Archangel before the throne, but of the poor way-worn "wrestler with the Spirit till the break of day." It must be cast into this new and singular form :—"The Scriptures are inspired, not throughout, but in many parts, and perhaps in all except those in which Coleridge finds difficulty at sixty years of age, and not earlier in life!" Viewed intellectually, no position can be more untenable than that in which Coleridge would land his disciples, when they compare such frank admissions of his own progress with the main drift of these "Confessions."

The Seventh Letter is an argument against plenary inspiration from the spirit of servile fear and bondage to the letter, in which it has often been maintained. It may be answered almost in Coleridge's own words: "Surely it behoves you to inquire whether you cannot be a believer in the inspiration of 'all Scripture' on your own faith. It must be beneath a wise man to disbelieve it on the ground of the superstitious way in which it is held by those who have no solid faith in Christianity itself."

In reality the evils alleged to arise from the doctrine,

when divorced from the vital truths of the Gospel, are no real presumption against it. Tear down the temple of Divine truth, leave one solitary pillar standing in its porch, and offer incense before it, and you may have a melancholy superstition, a pitiful idolatry. To renew the temple on its original plan, in its first beauty, it may possibly be more safe and convenient to remove this pillar for a time, but it must be replaced before the building can be complete. Till then, it might hinder the masons, and be chipped and injured, or broken by the scaffolding that must be placed around it. Remove it then carefully, not dashing it in pieces, but remembering it may have, ere long, to be replaced, and then build freely and fast from the foundation to the top-stone. When your building is complete, this pillar will find its own place. In other words, be content to suspend your faith in the all-inclusive inspiration of the Bible for a time, until you can receive it on true grounds. It cannot be so clear or so important a truth that every verse of Scripture is a word from God himself, as that contradictions cannot be true, that God requires a reasonable service; that He is holy, and hates all sin; that He is love, and delights in mercy; and that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, whose commands you are bound to obey, and on whose sacrifice all your hopes are to rest. Do not venture to deny that all Scripture is inspired. You may not be able to decide fully on so wide a question, till first principles have been well mastered. With increased knowledge, you may yet find your difficulties melt away, and that the doctrine only adds to the har-

monies of revealed truth. But do not let consequences from this doctrine, assumed too hastily, perplex your first steps in the pursuit of Divine knowledge. Rather believe the song of Deborah uninspired, than that the God of Christians has pleasure in treachery; or that the Psalms owe their form, in part, to human infirmity in the Psalmist, than that God would justify or approve private hate and selfish malice. And so of all the rest. But remember, it is one thing to suspend your faith in a doctrine, once held superstitiously, till you can satisfy yourself that it is in harmony with the spirit and scope of God's revelation; and another to reject it, in the face of strong and direct testimonies of God's word that *seem* to affirm it, when almost every difficulty has been removed.

Such a temporary suspense of faith in plenary inspiration may be the safer course for an inquiring and sceptical Christian to pursue, who is honest in his inquiry. To receive nothing on false grounds, and no truth out of its due order, may be the best preparation for a healthy and vigorous faith at the last. But we smooth the pathway of recovery for hopeful sceptics at far too dear a price, when, for their sake, we set aside, or pare down a revealed truth, inject doubts and difficulties into the life-blood of the Universal Church, and impute error to those messages, which the Holy Spirit has caused to be written and recorded for our learning by men of God, and which He has sealed in every part with the signet of heaven.

THE NATURE AND EFFECTS OF THE ATONEMENT.

Atonement by the sacrifice of Christ is the heart and life of Christianity. The Gospel rests upon the truth, that "Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures," that He "was made a curse for us," and "bore our sins in His own body on the tree." But a clear apprehension of this great doctrine is a hard and high attainment, and no slight obscurity rests on it in many minds, which desire to hold it with a reasonable faith. Great questions arise, to which conflicting answers have been given. Did our Lord bear the sins of the saved only, or of all mankind? How far is the transfer of guilt to the innocent consistent with the eternal laws of truth and righteousness? Is the substitution total or partial? Does it include all sins, and sin in all aspects, or some only? What is the nature of the curse which Christ endured? What are the results of the sacrifice itself, and what are those which depend on the faith and repentance of the sinner? Is all punishment of those for whom an atonement has been made illegal and unjust? If Christ

died for all, how is it that it is still "appointed for all men once to die?" Can the sentence be repealed by atonement, and still remain?

In the "Ways of God," chap. vii., I have attempted to throw some light on these difficulties. But the thoughts there published are too briefly expressed, and liable to misconstruction; and have been approved by some, and condemned by others, on mistaken or insufficient grounds. A clearer exposition of them will, I trust, be a real help to many perplexed and thoughtful minds. Heresy itself is often the natural recoil from a distorted and lifeless orthodoxy. The moral government of God can hardly be subject to a worse travesty than when lowered to this one claim, that a certain amount of suffering must be exacted, it matters not from whom, for a certain number or amount of sins. The conscience revolts from a view so unworthy of the Divine holiness, so alien from the whole tenour of Divine revelation. A creed in which there is no substitution, and a creed in which there is nothing but substitution, depart equally, on opposite sides, from the truth of God. Let us try, with modesty and reverence, to disentangle, one by one, the difficulties in this part of revealed religion.

I. First, what is the extent of the atonement? Did Christ die for the saved only, or for all mankind?

Here the answer of the Bible is plain. There are texts where Christ is said to give himself for the Church, for His sheep. There are others where, indefinitely, He is said to die for many, for sinners, for

men unjust. There are none where He is said to die for the Church only, for His sheep only. Such alone could exclude a wider message, while these agree with it, and are included in it, as a part in the whole to which it belongs.

On the other hand, the language of many texts is strictly universal. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. liii. 6). "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John i. 29). "The bread I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (vi. 51). "If one died for all, then all died: and he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live to themselves, but to him that died for them, and rose again" (2 Cor. v. 14, 15). "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (v. 19). "That he, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man" (Heb. ii. 9). "Who gave himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim. ii. 6). "And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world" (1 John ii. 2). "We have seen, and do testify, that the Father sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world" (1 John iv. 14).

The same truth is implied in the very nature of the Gospel. It calls on the sinner to believe what must be true before he believes it, and this on the authority of God's message, not of some secret hidden revelation to himself alone. What he has first to believe is what the Corinthians received first of all from the Apostle,

that Jesus Christ died for our sins (1 Cor. xv. 3). If He died for the saved only, then the faith of the sinner, when he first hears the Gospel, cannot rest on the simple word of God. It must be builded rather on a secret persuasion of his own final safety, for which that word, as yet, gives him no warrant. None of the signs of grace, which it supplies to the believer, can precede, but all must follow, the first act by which he believes that Christ died for his sins, and rests his hope on that atoning sacrifice.

The Church of England, in full harmony with Scripture, announces plainly the same truth, that Christ died for all men, and for all their sins. We read it in Art. XXXI., in the summary of the Creed, in the Catechism, and in the Communion doubly—both in the prayer of consecration, and in the sublime thanksgiving near the close. Thus it meets us in the first and the last steps of that ladder of Jacob, by which babes and sucklings are promoted into fellowship with the anthems and the worship of heaven.

II. Our Lord Jesus Christ, then, died for all. He tasted death for every man. He is the propitiation, not for Jews only, nor for believers only, but for the sins of the whole world. And now the question must arise, Did He die for multitudes wholly in vain? Can sins be atoned for, and the sinner still perish? Can punishment be exacted from a Divine substitute, and those be punished for whom this costly ransom has been paid? If the atonement includes all men, and still all men are not saved, but many lost, must we not lower its efficacy,

and admit that, in many cases, Christ has died in vain? In what sense, then, can He have borne the sins of the whole world? What are the proper and direct results of this atonement? And what are those which flow from it, but still depend on that moral change which is wrought by the Gospel in the hearts of true penitents alone?

The answer to these questions must be sought in a further truth. Christ bore indeed the sin of the world, the collective guilt of all mankind. A truth how strangely solemn, how sublimely glorious! But all sin has two different, almost opposite, characters. In one of these it can, in the other it cannot, be transferred. It is an act done once for all, which cannot be undone. Once committed, it stands engraven on the scheme of Providence, a transgression of God's law, a rebellion against the Supreme Lawgiver, which needs some public vindication of His outraged authority. But it is also the act of a conscious agent, the sign of his present state, which may be changed or even reversed, but which, while it lasts, must make him hateful in the sight of a holy God.

Sin is a debt, and also a disease. It is a transgression of the Divine law, without and above the sinner. It is a transgression, also, against the health and life of the spirit within. Each view of it is equally Scriptural, equally important. The debt needs a ransom, the disease a cure. If sin were only a disease, there would be much room for sympathy, none for substitution. Atonement and propitiation would be wholly out of place. Our

only want would be the healing, soothing power of some attractive pattern of perfect love. If sin were only a debt, substitution would be a complete Gospel, and all for whom an atonement was made would be heirs of salvation, because of that substitution alone. Those for whom Christ died would then be saved, even before they believe. Their debt once paid, no punishment or loss could reach them any more. Again, those who are not saved, on this view, must have had no sacrifice provided, no glad tidings sent. The Gospel, if preached to them at all, would be only a falsehood, a snare, and a delusion. They would be wholly beyond the redemption of Christ, like the fallen angels. The Saviour would neither have lived nor died for them, and to invite them to believe this would be simply persuading them to believe a lie.

These two aspects of sin, outwardly towards the law of God, and inwardly as the present sign of a state of heart displeasing to God, and ruinous to the soul's health, have an opposite relation to the doctrine of repentance. An act once done cannot be undone. No repentance can wipe out the stain, or reverse the record of rebellion. But sinful acts cease to be the index of a sinful heart, when the heart itself is changed by true repentance. The sinner then dies to the sin, and the sin itself expires, in its character of a moral test. Thus the disease of sin needs to be healed by an inward work in the heart, and not by substitution. The debt may be borne and paid by a substitute, but can never be done away by repentance alone. So also, in actual life, a workman, disabled by grievous illness for his work, may contract a debt he

cannot pay. He now suffers under a double burden—a debt unpaid, and a disease uncured. A physician might cure the complaint, but the debt would remain. A benefactor might pay the debt for him, and still the disease be unhealed. It is only a double gift, a payment and a cure, which can restore him to a state of freedom, health, and peace. And these two benefits might be linked with each other. If there is a medicine that can heal, and the sick man, through ignorance or prejudice, should refuse to apply it, he might be degraded into a helpless and worthless pauper, a mere drain on wasted benevolence, by help unwisely given. A wise benefactor might then make his promise to pay the debt already due to depend on proof of willingness to consult the physician, and use the prescribed remedies. The medicine would not pay the debt, nor the payment heal the disease; and still the payment and the first step in the cure would be linked inseparably in one work of love.

These two distinct aspects of all sin, when we look below the surface, enter into the whole economy of redemption, and even serve to define the very form of Divine revelation. It consists of two distinct parts, the Law and the Gospel, the Old Covenant and the New. Again, the law may be viewed in a double light, either as the earnest and preparation for the Gospel, containing all the germs of the later message, or else as its antithesis and contrast. The former aspect of the law is unfolded in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the latter, mainly, in those to the Galatians and the Romans.

What, then, is the nature of this contrast, which determines the whole structure of the word of God? The Law exhibits a perfect standard, and exacts a penalty for every failure. The Gospel assumes the moral bankruptcy of those to whom it is given, and provides a ransom for their guilt, and healing medicine for their moral and spiritual sickness. One deals with man as a creature, sets before him the rule of perfection, and severs all creatures into the unfallen and the fallen, the sinless and the sinful. The other deals with men as fallen creatures, sets before them a way of recovery, and severs them into the impenitent and the penitent, the faithless and the believing, those who still turn their backs upon the God of grace, and those who seek Him diligently, to regain His lost image in righteousness and true holiness. And thus the Law, as law, makes no provision for repentance. Its message is simple and solemn. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law, to do them." But it also recognizes the truth, that sin, though repentance cannot undo it, may be transferred from the sinner, and be the object of a Divinely-provided atonement. The Gospel reveals a true and Divine atonement, as the basis on which it wholly rests. But its own message, from the first, is a call to repentance, and a promise of forgiveness, adoption, and every blessing, to the penitent alone. It is the voice of the Law, that sin is a debt, a moral bankruptcy, a just exposure to death and the curse, which no mere repentance can do away, and which it needs a sin-offering to remove; and

also that human help is vain, since "no man can redeem his brother, or give unto God a ransom for him." It is the voice of the Gospel, that a Divine atonement has been made, that Christ is "the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world;" and that an inward, personal change of heart, a present acceptance of God's mercy, a genuine faith in Christ, is the needful moral condition, that the disease of sin may be healed, and the sinner may be restored to the favour of God in this life, and the full enjoyment of His glorious presence in the life to come. The Law deals thus with all sin objectively, in reference to the strict claims of Divine justice, and the rights of the Supreme Lawgiver. The Gospel, first of all, reveals this claim as already satisfied by the death of Christ alone; and then deals with sin subjectively, in the actual rebellion of the heart, and brings the power of the Cross, and the energy of the quickening Spirit, to bear on these strongholds of the kingdom of darkness in the hearts of sinful men.

III. What, then, apart from the Atonement, is the state of mankind before God? What is their legal standing, and the nature of the curse and sentence under which they lie?

The Law of God is the standard of right and moral perfection. Its claim is unalterable, and cannot be lowered: perfect love to God, and love to man, and the actions that flow from perfect love. This is God's righteous claim, and, whenever it is not satisfied, the soul is morally bankrupt. Sin once committed, debt once incurred, can never be cancelled by later obedience.

That obedience is already due, and its absence would be a new debt added to the old. Thus, when sin has once entered, the Law, as law, provides no remedy. Its promise is to the sinless alone. To the sinful it denounces God's sentence—"The soul that sinneth, it shall die."

The sentence of the broken law is death. But what is the meaning of this death, the curse denounced by the law on every transgressor? It needs some care and thought to answer this question aright. The death meant must be the same which was threatened in Paradise, and which entered the world through Adam's sin. Again, it is a contrast to the second death, the final sentence of the last judgment. When one is inflicted, the other is abolished. "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. xx. 14). It is not the mere act of dying. In all Scripture it is ascribed to the soul, even when separated from the body. "In death there is no remembrance of thee; and who will give thee thanks in the pit?" The words temporal and eternal, often applied to death, tend rather to mislead, than to explain the true nature of this contrast. The first death is temporal, because its future abolition is a revealed promise; but in its own nature, apart from Christ's redemption, it would be everlasting. Neither the faculties of the creature, nor the nature of sin, nor the justice of God, assign it any limit or bound. It is due to a mighty work of redemption alone, that it is swallowed up in eternal victory.

This death, the sentence of the law, extends to the whole man, both soul and body. To see its nature as

respects the soul, we must reflect on its work with reference to the body. One is the visible sign and sacrament of the other. . The body is then parted from the soul, its life; and being thus parted, becomes the prey of inward corruption. So, also, death is the separation of the soul from God, the true source of life; and all the confusion, chaos, and moral corruption and dissolution which follows that awful separation. Without, there is banishment from the presence of God, and from all the light of His favour and blessing. Within, there will follow the unrestrained working of moral corruption, degrading, perverting, desecrating all the faculties and powers of the immortal spirit. Sin would thus become, under the name of death, a "finished" evil, its own ever-growing torment, and the soul sink deeper and deeper in an abyss of hopeless misery.

On this view we may see the force of the contrasted figures, by which the first and second death are portrayed. One is "the lake of fire," solemn indeed and most awful, yet bounded in its range, shut in by firm land on every side. The other is "the deep," the abyss, "the bottomless pit," evil reigning, rioting, growing, deepening without limit and without end, in its fatal descent, farther and farther, from light, happiness, and heaven. By the sentence of the law, fulfilled without atonement or redemption, mankind, once fallen, would be shut out from God's presence, and sink and sink, and sink for ever, in this abyss of hopeless and endless ruin. There would have been, through ages without end, the awful reality of a God-dishonouring, God-hating, God-blas-

pheming, self-tormenting, God-abandoned universe. Such death is the wages of sin, its due desert, and the issue to which it naturally tends. It is the fatal harvest from the seeds of moral corruption harboured in the soul. "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

IV. What, now, is the nature of Christ's Atonement? What is the curse He endured for sin? What is the direct and proper result of that Atonement, apart from the mighty moral change, in all who obey the Gospel, wrought by the magnetic, transforming power of the Cross of Christ?

Here the testimony of Scripture is plain. "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." "He made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin." "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." "He suffered for our sins, the just for the unjust." "Who himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree." "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." A sinful character was never once ascribed to our Lord. He was, and was ever held to be, in the midst of His sufferings, the Holy One of God, who might not see corruption, the Lamb of God without blemish or spot, who "knew no sin." Sin was ascribed or imputed to Him, not as the sign of a sinful character, but in direct contrast to the claims of a character declared to be free from all spot or stain of sin. It was in its other aspect, as a series of acts done, that could not be reversed, of transgressions against the authority of the Supreme Lawgiver, that the sin of the world, one vast collective whole, was laid, like the wood of

the sacrifice, upon the shoulders of the world's Redeemer. And the curse which He bore was death, the first death, so far as it was due to the demerit of sin and the claims of Divine justice alone, and was not aggravated by the further working of moral corruption in the heart of God-abandoned sinners.

When God reveals His justice in dealing with the moral character of men, He must deal with them according to the truth. The Holy One, who loved righteousness and hated iniquity, whose life was sinless, and whose love is perfect, must then be anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows. But when He deals with sin in its other aspect, as transgression of the law, reversible by no repentance, the perfection of the Victim on whom the guilt is laid, and from whom the penalty is exacted, serves only to place in the clearest light the essential sinfulness and hatefulness of sin, and the authority of that law which the sinner has despised. The claim of God's holiness is ill explained by a law of mechanical compensation, as if the sufferings, for a few days and nights, of an Infinite Person, were exactly equal to those of the multitudes of mankind through a whole eternity of ruin and sorrow. Sin and its punishment are not such finite, measurable things. What is needed for the full vindication of God's authority is that His holy anger against all sin, as sin, should, once for all, be displayed to the uttermost, before any soul that has fallen from God, and rebelled against Him, can be restored to the perfect enjoyment of His favour and blessing. This is the baptism of fire, of which our Lord said, "How

am I straitened, till it be accomplished!" He endured for our sakes that death which is the curse of the broken law, and in His case its sting was not removed. He cried upon the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He suffered the pains, the pangs of death. He was laid "in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps," and was vexed with all the storms and waves of God's holy displeasure against the sin of a guilty world. The Highest and the Holiest stooped to the lowest abasement of shame and sorrow. He endured death, the sentence of the law, in all its darkest terrors, so far as these are separable from the aggravations caused by reigning sin, gloomy remorse, fierce, untamed passion, deep self-torment, and utter despair.

When once this claim of Divine justice against sin, as sin, had thus been fully satisfied, and the Holy One had descended to the deep of Sheol, enduring the bitter anguish of sojourn in the dark land of death, then the further claim of the same justice, that all shall be dealt with according to their true moral character, began forthwith to assert its unchangeable authority. The pains of death were loosed, because it was not possible that the Sinless One should be holden thereby. No sooner had He entered the deep, fathomed its dark abyss, and endured the worst extreme of separation from His Heavenly Father, than the curse exhausted its bitterness, and the blessing began to reveal its power. That same day He left the deep of Sheol or Hades, and entered its Paradise, the sheltered resting-place of the faithful dead. The third day He left the under-world of the dead, and rose victo-

rious from the grave, to die no more. The fortieth day He completed His upward return, and "journeyed into heaven, angels, and authorities, and powers being made subject unto him." Because He had stooped unutterably low, He was raised unutterably high, "far above all principality, and power, and might, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but in the world to come."

The direct and immediate result of this great atonement answers to its character, as thus defined, and is clearly pointed out in the word of God. The world is now reconciled to God. Rom. xi. 15. 2 Cor. v. 19. The veil of the law's condemnation, spread over the face of all nations, is taken away and destroyed. Isa. xxv. 7. No amount of past sin is now any barrier to the instant restoration of the sinner to God's favour and blessing. The middle wall of partition, which no bitter repentance could remove, is broken down, and there is free and instant access for every returning penitent to the house and home of love, from which their sins had banished them. There is left no hindrance, no barrier without, on the part of Divine justice, administering a perfect Law; but only the hindrance within, from the present unbelief and pride of those who will not accept a Divine remedy, and who resist and cast aside the grace of the Gospel. The curse and condemnation of the Law is done away in the cross of Christ. The condemnation of the Gospel alone remains. "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." And

thus the effects of Christ's Atonement, common to all mankind, are these: the removal of an impassable and hopeless barrier between sinful creatures and a holy God; the provision of a day of grace, in which mercy may be found; rich forbearance and long-suffering towards years and ages of abounding sin; the abolition of the first death, the wages of sin, which is to be swallowed up in eternal victory; the resurrection of the body; and the transfer of men from the reign of death, and the curse of utter vanity, to a state in which God, the God of love and holiness, will be for ever glorified—though by some in the height of heavenly glory, and by others only in the depth of just retribution and eternal shame.

V. What, in the last place, is the connexion between the Atonement and the special benefits obtained by those who believe and obey the Gospel?

Sin is both a debt and a disease. It is doubly a debt, both directly, as a transgression, or series of transgressions of God's law; and indirectly, as the sign of a rebellious state of heart, involving guilt as well as corruption before God. The Atonement, in itself, removes the debt only, and in its first and simplest aspect alone. But the guilt of present rebellion, and the disease of reigning sin, can be removed only by an inward change of heart, the work of the regenerating Spirit of God. Here the Atonement avails, not by the mere fact of its accomplishment on the cross, but as a moral magnet, a mighty fountain of new and heavenly life to the souls of men. The substitution of Christ belongs to His sacrificial death alone. But His incarnation, His sinless

life, His glorious resurrection and ascension, are all equally the source of those gifts which, as the Federal Head of mankind, and more especially of the Church, He pours down abundantly upon all His people. He bore the curse of the Law, that men might not bear it. He died, that men might not taste of death in its full bitterness, armed with its deadly sting, nor remain under its power, but that it might be destroyed for ever. But He stooped from heaven, that He might raise us to heaven. He obeyed, that we too might obey. He humbled himself, that He might make us humble. He rose from the dead, that we too might rise. He ascended, as our Forerunner, that in due season we also might ascend, and sit with Him in heavenly places in the world to come. In these aspects of His redeeming work, substitution has no place, but federal headship alone. The Atonement prepares the way for these further benefits. It is the only foundation on which they rest. But it does not secure them by the mere fact that a full sacrifice has been made. They depend on a further work of repentance and faith in the heart of the sinner, whereby the soul is engrafted into the True Vine, and becomes a living member of the mystical body of Christ. Till this change is wrought, the curse of the Law is removed, but the curse of the Gospel remains. "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." And the disease of sin also remains still without a cure. The rebellion is even aggravated by the greatness of the mercy which

is still despised, and the rich provision of grace, which the soul refuses to receive. But the same Atonement which removes the legal curse is the grand instrument, appointed by God, and applied and used by the Holy Spirit, for working this inward and mighty change in the hearts of men. When a rich and kind friend pays a debt for a prisoner, the substitution properly belongs to the payment only, and its immediate effect is his release from prison. But the same friend, when the debtor is released, may receive him into his family, provide him with a fresh education, and introduce him into a new sphere of life, leading to riches, happiness, and honour. The prisoner, condemned before to the society of criminals, and sinking fast in moral degradation, may come under better and nobler influences; and gratitude for the benefit he has received may lead him to copy the moral excellences of the beloved benefactor by whom his ransom was paid, and on whom all his present comforts and blessings depend. All these results are no part of the payment which was first made. No law of justice requires that they should exactly equal that sacrifice of comfort or ease to which the rich friend submitted on his payment of the debt. And yet they are so entirely dependent on this first act of love, that, in a looser sense, they may be called the purchase of that first ransom. In strictness of speech, however, this phrase does not apply, and rather tends to obscure the true nature and condition of these latter benefits. And thus we find in the Scriptures that Christ is never said to have bought blessings for His people; nor are adoption, regeneration, holiness, peace, resurrection, ever styled

the purchase of His precious blood. It is His people themselves who are purchased, bought, redeemed from the power of the curse, the bondage of sin, the dominion of Satan; that being brought out of the prison-house, and made once more the freemen of the Lord, they may freely receive, with no impediment from Divine justice, whatever blessings the free bounty of God the Father is pleased to bestow. And yet all these gifts and blessings come to them through Christ alone. He is the Vine, and they are the branches. He is the Head, and they are the members. He is the great Fountain, from whom and through whom alone every stream of grace must flow down to a sinful world. Spiritual union with the risen Saviour is the fixed, unalterable condition on which all the blessings of personal salvation must for ever depend. The curse of the Law can be removed by the Atonement alone, believed or disbelieved. The curse of the Gospel, the moral guiltiness of present rebellion, the sore sickness and disease of indwelling sin, can be removed by repentance and faith alone, and in no other way. Here substitution can have no place. Each must repent for himself. Each must believe for himself. Each for himself must lay hold upon the promises of the new covenant. To bear the burdens of others is the law of Christ, which finds its highest fulfilment in His atoning sacrifice alone. But this work of the Redeemer in our stead must be followed by a work of the Holy Spirit within us, in which the spirit of man is a fellow-worker with God, before salvation can be ours in the fulness of

its revealed blessings. And here the further truth applies, that "every man shall bear his own burden." "He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." A great work of Divine love has been wrought for mankind, once for all, upon the cross, whereby the first death has been abolished, and will be swallowed up in eternal victory. But a further work is needful, wrought by the Spirit of God in every contrite heart, through faith in that Divine atonement; that the soul may attain a full salvation, and being freed from the power of the second death, may have right to the tree of life, and enter in through the gates into the celestial city.

ON ETERNAL JUDGMENT.

The doctrine of the Atonement is closely linked with the teaching of Scripture concerning the solemn truth of judgment to come. Some remarks on this subject have been offered in the previous letters, but they need to be further unfolded, that we may gain, if it be possible, a clearer and fuller insight into these deep things of God.

A double perplexity presses here upon every thoughtful mind. If Christ died for all, how can multitudes for whom He died perish in their sins, and be lost for ever? And again, how can a Being of perfect love create vast numbers of intelligent creatures, capable of largest happiness, with the certain foresight that the result of that creation will be their everlasting misery? Out of these two difficulties a further question will arise. What is the nature of that death which is abolished by the death of Christ, and of that second death which abides and endures for ever?

The effects of the Atonement are gloriously complete in the case of all who believe and obey the Gospel. They are translated from darkness to light, from death

to life, from the curse of the broken law to the blessing of the new covenant, from the shame, sorrow, and misery of the Fall to the perfect joy and blessedness of the kingdom of God. There are other effects, less complete, but no less real, which extend to all mankind. The Apostle ascribes to it plainly "the passing over of bygone sins in the forbearance of God." Strict justice would imply the instant punishment of all transgression. But mankind have been placed, from the first, under an economy of rich mercy and long forbearance. The sun has risen upon the evil and the good, and rain has been sent upon the just and the unjust. Such a time of probation and day of grace to all mankind implies a Divine propitiation. All the countless gifts of God, bestowed on successive generations of fallen sinners for six thousand years, can only be explained by the fact that God, from the first, had provided for Himself a spotless Lamb, to be the sin-offering for the whole world.

Again, it is a revealed truth and promise of God's word, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. And this resurrection, in every case, is an effect of the redeeming work of Christ. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." "For this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living." It is by virtue of his death for all, that all who are in the graves shall hear his voice, and come forth to stand before him in judgment.

But are these the only results of the Atonement in the case of those who die in their sins, and reject the

offered grace of the Gospel? Are temporal blessings during the day of grace, and the bodily resurrection, which issues in solemn judgment, the sole gain, in the case of these multitudes of sinners, resulting from the anguish and bitter agony of the Son of God?

The true answer, I believe it will be found on deeper thought, is widely different. The death which Christ came to abolish, and will abolish, is far more than the dissolution of the body alone. It implies a calamity to the soul, in separation from God, answering to mortality and corruption in the body, when it is parted from the soul, and becomes a lifeless and loathsome carcase. It means the abandonment of the spirit, driven out from God's presence, to the unchecked, unbounded, unabated consequences of its own inward corruption and wickedness. "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." Those ideas, which many connect with the doom of the lost, of ever-during, self-tormenting wickedness, unrestrained by the hand of God, belong rather to that death, which is God's last enemy, and which Christ has come to destroy and abolish for ever. This is the dark mysterious power of the abyss, that bottomless pit, in which new and strange forms of rebellion and blasphemy have their secret birth, darkening the bright sunshine and the free air of heaven. And it is the common boon which the Atonement secures to all mankind, the saved and the unsaved alike, that this awful, mighty enemy of God and man, the sum of all possible evil and misery in a God-forsaken universe, is destroyed, abolished, and done away for ever.

The second death is solemn and terrible. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Is it more terrible and awful than that first death, which is the finishing and consummation of sin, and which the Redeemer came to destroy? One is God's minister, the other is God's last and mightiest enemy. One is a resurrection, the other corruption and darkness without end. One is described as a lake, though a lake of fire, shut in by Emmanuel's land on every side; the other is the bottomless pit, the deep, the abyss, a depth of evil unexhausted, and without redemption inexhaustible. One is the state in which the enemies of Christ are made His footstool; the other would be the reign of those enemies, in a rival dominion of blasphemy and outer darkness, a deep as unsearchable below as the height of heaven above. For God "is not the God of the dead, but of the living," and the reign of death would imply the awful fact of an empire of evil, rivalling both in extent and continuance the dominion of the living God, the God of love.

It is a deep thought of Plato in his Dialogues, that just as the sick man resorts to the physician, so wicked men, if they were wise, and knew what was really good, would offer themselves up, of their own accord, to undergo the punishment which is the only fit medicine for their inward disease. This truth will apply even to the last act of solemn judgment. Compared with the awful wages of sin, left without redemption, of death without resurrection, of corruption working ever without restraint, and evil triumphing for ever, and tormenting itself for ever, in its own abyss of darkness, even the

second death with all its terrors may be, not only in the sight of a holy God, but even in the consciousness of the lost themselves, an infinite gain. That death and hell should be cast into the lake of fire is a work of redemption, a triumph of Divine love. The Atonement, then, even in its wider effects on all mankind, as well as in its special blessings to those who obey the Gospel, may procure what in God's sight is an inestimable gain. Through his own death our Lord has destroyed the reign of him who had the power of death, the devil, and abolished that fatal and awful power, God's last enemy, which involves the worst and most unmingled misery of the creature, as well as the foulest dishonour to the name of the Most High. Alike in the case of the saved and the unsaved, the heirs of glory and of shame, the Son of God will not have borne the curse and endured anguish and agony in vain. The result in each case is widely different, but in each it is a triumph of redeeming goodness, when in the resurrection of the faithful "death is swallowed up in victory," and when, in the judgment of the unfaithful, "death and hell are cast into the lake of fire."

Let us now inquire with reverence, what light does Scripture throw on the nature of the second death. Does it really contradict the perfections of the God of love? It is a state of punishment and anguish, of shame and everlasting contempt. Is it revealed to be such pure, unmingled, uncompensated misery, as to make God's original gift of being no boon whatever, but an infinite evil to all who incur this fearful sentence of eternal judgment?

The direct statements of Scripture on the state of lost souls are solemn and fearful. We do well to take heed how we tamper with God's threatenings, or say or do any thing to weaken their voice of warning to the heedless sinner. "Their worm," our Lord tells us repeatedly, "dieth not, and their fire is not quenched." They rise "to shame and everlasting contempt." They "go away into everlasting punishment." They are "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord." God is to be feared, because He "is able to destroy both body and soul in hell." They "suffer the vengeance of eternal fire." They "are tormented in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb," and "the smoke of the torment goeth up for ever and ever." Even the Gospel itself is defined by the Baptist and St. Paul, as a message of deliverance from "the wrath to come."

Again, there seem to be no direct statements of Scripture, to mitigate, reverse, or explain away these solemn warnings. In the Old Testament the doctrine itself had hardly begun to be revealed, and hence further light, to modify or unfold the warning, could scarcely be given. The doom there denounced to sinners, to be turned into Hades, belongs to the first death, and is a contrast to their resurrection to judgment. This is announced in Dan. xii. 2, but even there it is not proclaimed as an universal truth. It cannot surprise us that little or no direct light should be thrown upon the doctrine, when the doctrine itself was hardly revealed. In the New Testament, again, no word occurs of direct mitigation, no

hint of any close to the judgment, no sound of comfort, which could weaken the solemn effect on the sinner of these warnings of God. If such further truths exist, they must be derived, not from direct statements of Scripture, but from meditation on its revealed truths below the surface, and from indirect inference alone.

On the other hand, this silence of Scripture is no real presumption against the presence of a further truth, secretly implied in its statements, though not expressly and openly revealed. There is a weighty reason for this silence, as already shown. Supposing the future state of souls unsaved to combine two contrasted elements, coexisting for ever, infinite goodness to them as creatures of the God of love, and everlasting punishment as rebels against a God of holiness, there is a most weighty reason why, in this time of probation, the wisdom of God should veil the first in silence, and reveal the second alone in stern and solemn warning. It is the highest victory of perfect love to be willing, for long ages, to endure the hard speeches and blasphemies of ungodly sinners, rather than disclose that part of God's counsels which would convict the blasphemers of ignorance and folly, but might also weaken the force of the warnings, by which the guilty may be reclaimed from their rebellion, and attain the happiness and glory of the ransomed children of God.

If, however, the silence of Scripture may thus be fully explained, does it not still supply a powerful motive against any attempt to remove the veil? If some hidden aspect of Divine truth, shedding hope and comfort on

that dark future, be revealed to a few thoughtful and reverent minds, which desire to see their Father's countenance more clearly, as the God of perfect love, beyond these dark clouds of the judgment to come, ought they not to reverence the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, and while they rejoice in the treasure they have found, and buy the field that conceals it, to hide it still, lest the thoughtless and profane should abuse it to their own ruin?

There is much force in this question. It proves the great responsibility involved in any public treatment of this doctrine, which strives to pass beyond the surface of the Divine warnings. It is no full warrant, in this case, for any public utterance, that it is true, and based on the deepest truths of God's word, unless it be also truth in due season. On the other hand, it is the office of the well-instructed scribe to bring out of the treasure-house of Scripture new things as well as old. There is a true no less than a false development of revealed doctrines, which must be ever in progress in the history of the Church of Christ. God's truth is a living thing, planted in the soil of God's Providence; and as that Providence unfolds from age to age, the truth, because it lives, must grow and shoot out fresh branches, that may bear fruit to the glory of God. The message of judgment to come, though a doctrine, is also a prophecy, and gradual expansion is the common law of all prophetic truth. At the eventide of the Gospel there is to be added light. In the time of the end, "many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased."

Again, there is a moral sign when a further disclosure of God's purposes in coming judgment, if He vouchsafes to throw new light upon it, becomes seasonable, and may lawfully be made known. When the sense of God's universal goodness, derived from His own word, has been more widely diffused, and has a firmer hold on the general conscience, than the authority of His word itself, then the silence, which once deepened the power of His warnings, will abate their force. Even serious and earnest minds will be tempted to disbelieve those parts of God's message, which they cannot reconcile with a truth plainly revealed, that His tender mercies are over all His works. To maintain a general conviction of the truth of God's warnings, it may then be needful to show that these are not the whole truth, and that in the case of all men, the saved and unsaved alike, in the depth as well as the height, it is true that "mercy rejoiceth against judgment."

Such a state of the Church and the world seems now to have come; so that a further unfolding of God's purpose of love towards all men, amidst the unreversed and irreversible messages of "the wrath to come," may now be, in the fullest sense of the words, "meat in due season." In this sense, as well as others, it may be that at the close of the mystic times of delay, and in the days of the seventh angel, "the mystery of God shall be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets." Let us endeavour, then, with reverence and humility, to glean light from all the declarations of Scripture which relate to this solemn subject.

First of all, the Second Death is not the reign of Satan in a kingdom of his own, where he torments his victims for ever.

This view of the state of lost souls is very often set forth in popular appeals to the fears of men. But it is wholly opposed to the real teaching of the word of God. We read in St. John, "For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." The fire, to which the ungodly are sentenced by their judge, is "prepared for the devil and his angels." And before their judgment the solemn announcement is made,—"The devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever." The foremost in guilt among all the countless rebels will then be foremost in punishment. He who is "king over all the children of pride," will be crushed, beyond all the proud, under the heaviest load of Divine judgment. The head of the old serpent will be bruised under the feet of the Seed of the Woman, the victorious Redeemer of mankind. No trace of a permitted reign of this Prince of darkness can be found, when once "death and hell" have been "cast into the lake of fire." Death is the last enemy to be destroyed. All others, Satan included, in their power of active rebellion, must therefore have been first destroyed. This Lucifer, son of the morning, once most exalted in blasphemous pride, will then be lowest in shame among those vanquished enemies, who are become the footstool of the King of kings, and Lord of lords.

Again, the Last Judgment and the Second Death are

one main part in a wise, holy, and perfect work of the God of love.

We read at the close of the Law this striking proclamation of God's name: "He is the Rock, his work is perfect; all his ways are judgment; a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he." The work of God is perfect. There is no flaw, no error, no mistake in the scheme of His universal Providence. On the side of the creature there is a vast and awful amount of sin, folly, and perverseness; but in that dominion of God, whereby He overcomes evil, there is no defect either of wisdom or goodness. "All his ways are judgment." Though "clouds and darkness are round about him," and may for a time conceal His goodness from weak or sinful eyes, yet "justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne."

When the prophet was told to go down to the potter's house, "the vessel he made of clay was marred in the hands of the potter, and he made it again another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make it" (Jer. xviii. 4). But the scheme of Providence is one vast work of God, one mighty whole. Once begun, it can never be reversed and begun anew. One single flaw would here be irreparable, and could never be cured. One unjust or unwise act of the God of Providence, like one sin in the perfect obedience of Christ, would mar the perfection, and change the character, of the whole work. Creation, Providence, Redemption, would then become one gigantic and irretrievable failure. But this can never be. "His work is perfect." The forbearance towards evil, while it lasts

and seems to triumph, is a perfect forbearance. The victory over evil, when that forbearance is full, must be a perfect victory. The issues of judgment, however solemn, are such, and must be such, that the All-wise, whose understanding is unsearchable, the All-good, whose mercies are over all His works, can acquiesce in them with a deep complacency and delight. The glory of the Lord shall endure for ever, the Lord shall rejoice in His works. His delight is eminently "to exercise loving-kindness and righteousness in the earth."

Now this revealed perfection of the whole work of God must shed its light on the mysterious subject of the second death. The first death is God's last and greatest enemy. It may be borne with for a time, but its continuance would be fatal to the dominion and glory of the Most High. "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." And hence the indignant sentence, "O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction!" But the second death proceeds directly from the appointment of the Supreme Judge, who is perfect alike in wisdom and goodness. However terrible, it is the Divine remedy for all that is most fearful and appalling of possible and actual evil in a fallen and rebellious universe. And thus the God of love and holiness can and will acquiesce in it, as one main element in His fore-ordained counsel of wisdom and goodness. To read in it the continuance of rebellion, hatred, and blasphemy, for ever, and deepen its terrors by heaping up all kinds of moral horrors, the unchecked ravings of fiendish malice, the blasphemous utterances

of raging despair, is to deny and reverse, so far, the revealed object of the work of Christ. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." The purpose of His judgment cannot be to stereotype and eternize active rebellion against God, but to abolish it for evermore. The second death, however solemn, completes a perfect work of God, the Only Wise, and crowns the victory of His perfect goodness over the worst malignity of evil.

The Doom of the Lost, it is further revealed, is the object of acquiescence and holy contemplation to all the unfallen and the redeemed.

With the views of hell-torment which have often been held, to hide it from the thoughts must be almost essential to happiness, in hearts not wholly dead to feelings of compassion. The bliss of heaven is then conceived to depend, very mainly, in being removed far away from sights and sounds unutterably mournful. Such, however, is not the revealed description of saints and angels in the kingdom of God. Their happiness is not made to depend either on their ignorance or their forgetfulness of the doom of the lost. This is placed among the objects of their ceaseless and solemn contemplation. "He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever." "And again they said Alleluia: and her smoke rose up for ever and ever." This acquiescence will not be that of stern, fierce, unloving hearts, but of "the spirits of just men made

perfect," and baptized into full sympathy with the tears, the compassion, and the agonies of the Son of God. That doom, however awful, can scarcely be one of unrelieved horror and darkness, which is the object of deep complacency and holy adoration to saints and angels, free from all selfishness and made perfect in love.

In this day of judgment, also, the honour due even to the wicked, as God's creatures, will still be fully recognized by the Righteous Judge.

The law of God is the reflection of His own eternal righteousness. The life of man is there fenced round, like a sword of flame turning every way, with this threatening,—"Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man." Many victims of murder have themselves been most degraded, guilty, and vile. But God here measures the sacredness of man's life, not by the debasement sin has caused, but by His own original work of creation. "In the image of God made he man." This law, the voice of His own truth and wisdom, will doubtless apply to His own acts of righteous judgment. Even while He punishes guilty rebels, He cannot cease to honour in them the workmanship of His own hands. And hence the same truth re-appears in this very form, in reference to God's own visitations of anger: "For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, *and the souls which I have made.*"

But the law of God supplies a further evidence of the

same truth. When the judges of Israel have been charged to justify the righteous and condemn the wicked, this further precept is given, that if the wicked man is worthy to be punished, he shall be beaten with stripes. But a limit is prescribed, with a reason for the limitation. "Forty stripes he may give him, and not exceed: lest, if he should exceed, and beat him above these with many stripes, then thy brother should seem vile unto thee."

Here a double lesson is taught. Wickedness that deserves and requires stripes is not to destroy the sense of brotherhood. Even when punished, the wicked man is called a brother still. Nay, the punishment is to be so measured that his due honour, as a brother, may not perish. He who first gave this law is the same in whose heart, as the Son of Man, it was written, and who will also pronounce the final sentence on the ungodly. The stripes, whether few or many, in the great day of account, will be inflicted by His sentence alone, Luke xii. 45—48. The doom, being measured on one side by the deep malignity of aggravated sin, may be unutterably severe. But this law is a pledge to us that the righteous Judge of quick and dead will still remember the honour of all men, as God's creatures, made at first in God's image, and that link of brotherhood which, through the wonderful grace of the incarnation, has linked Him with every sinner of mankind.

Again, the Last Judgment is the work of God's mercy, as well as of His righteousness. This is plainly revealed to us in those words of the Psalmist: "Also unto thee, O

Lord, belongeth mercy; for thou renderest to every man according to his work."

In the judgment of the righteous, it is easy to explain this inspired message of Divine truth. The works rewarded are the fruits of the Spirit, and flow from redeeming mercy alone. Hence the reward itself must be traced back to the same fountain, as in the prayer of our Church: "Grant that whosoever is here dedicated to Thee by our office and ministry may also be endued with heavenly virtues, and everlastingly rewarded through Thy mercy, who dost live and govern all things, world without end."

When applied, however, in their wider range, to "every man," to the lost as well as the saved, the sentence conceals a deeper truth. Can it be true, even of the souls that perish, that there is mercy in the sentence which dooms them to the lake of fire? Does not the deep thought, which revealed itself more dimly to Plato by the light of nature, receive here a direct and full sanction from the Spirit of God? Compared with that unequalled and most awful curse of evil being left to work out its own terrible issues in the darkness of utter banishment from the Divine presence, even the justice of God, in all its severity, may be like a medicine to guilty sinners. Their doom will be awful, but a world abandoned to its own unrestrained and consummate wickedness would be more terrible and awful still. The revealed place of judgment is a lake, not a sea, an ocean, an abyss of fire. In the same hour, the abyss, the bottomless pit, boundless in its breadth and depth, the yawning, craving

Sheol, that can never be satisfied, is destroyed and abolished by the power of the Redeemer. It is mercy to the wicked to deny them the fatal power of adding sin to sin for ever. It is mercy to keep them, under the mighty hand of God, from the power of tormenting each other by the ever-growing indulgence of their own fierce and hateful passions. It is mercy to force them back, though captive and in chains, to the presence of that Infinite Goodness, from which their own rebellious hearts would hide them still deeper and deeper in delusion and darkness for evermore.

Again, the Second Death is a resurrection to "shame and everlasting contempt," Dan. xii. 2. It involves thus, in its very nature, the mystery of an eternal contrast. Since it is a resurrection, it is a work of redemption, a fruit of the great atoning work of the world's Redeemer. But it is not simply a work of redemption. It is the perpetual, abiding manifestation of the creature's shame and moral emptiness, in contrast to the immutable, glorious perfection of the God of holiness. It obscures the Gospel, and distorts our view of the whole course of Providence, when we ascribe a result so solemn to a capricious, unaccountable withholding of Divine grace, to some defect either of wisdom or goodness in the Most High, some deliberate preference of the destruction of sinners to their salvation. An oath of the Most High shields His name from this dark suspicion of unbelieving hearts, which have never fathomed the sinfulness of sin, or the stubbornness of evil. But when we refer it for its hidden key to the contrast between the Only Good and

the creatures of His hand, then we may see how the work of redemption can turn what might seem an incurable triumph of evil into the crown and seal of its own perfect victory. It may be this continual spectacle of what the creature is in itself, which maintains the whole unfallen and ransomed universe in its only true and safe position of dependence on the Fountain of life and love. The Israelites were warned before they entered the land of promise, "lest when all thou hast is multiplied, then thy heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God" (Deut. viii. 14). When the redemption has been so complete, in myriads on myriads of ransomed souls, that no trace of sin, corruption, or mortality remains, how easily might pride creep in once more, and a second and more fatal apostasy ensue, if the lessons of the past, fading ever into the further distance, were not renewed and deepened by the present sight of those in whom is still to be learned the creature's lesson of self-emptiness and utter shame. That solemn doom, though no choice of the free bounty of the Most High, whose love and wisdom have displayed themselves to the utmost in warnings to keep the sinner from the path of ruin, may yet be the object of His deep and holy acquiescence, because in this way alone a rescued universe may be upheld for ever in the enjoyment of a blessedness based on perfect humility, and therefore capable of enlarging itself without end. It may be thus through the work of judgment alone, that the bulwarks will be reared of that heavenly city, whose walls are Salvation, and her gates are Praise.

Let us now pass on to the New Testament, and trace

the lessons which flow indirectly from the teaching of our Lord and his Apostles on the judgment to come.

First of all, the Second Death is a work of the God of truth, abolishing pride and falsehood out of the whole universe.

The New Testament opens its messages with the history of the temptation, the conflict of the Evil One, the king of pride, with the meek and lowly Redeemer. And the result of the conflict there begun is revealed in the maxim, often repeated:—"Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

This great truth has to receive ten thousand thousand illustrations. But the first and chief is in the contrasted lot of the proud Tempter and the lowly Man of sorrows. The Son of God, because He stooped low with wondrous humility, is to be crowned with eternal and infinite glory. The Adversary, the proud Son of the morning, because he said in his heart, I will be like the Most High, shall be condemned to the shame and vengeance of eternal fire. And thus that fire, prepared for Satan and his angels, must be the destruction of guilty pride, become consubstantiate with the immortal spirit, and capable of being destroyed in no gentler way than by this ever-during stroke of Divine judgment. "Them that walk in pride he is able to abase." The created being itself will not fail, since it is a gift of God, without repentance, and is secretly upheld by the Creator's mighty hand. But

the stubbornness of that pride which is no longer separable, along with the sinful flesh, as in the day of grace, but has its home in the spirit, will encounter something firmer and mightier than itself, the inflexible holiness of the God of judgment. Proud imaginations, the high things which exalt themselves against the knowledge of Christ, are idols of the heart, and these idols God will utterly abolish. That last great day will be "against every thing that is high and lifted up, and it shall be brought low." The rebellious creature will be taught, in spite of itself, to take its true and right place at the footstool of triumphant holiness; and the twin reign of falsehood and of pride will cease, under the searching, humbling, penetrating presence of the God of truth and holiness, even that presence which is a consuming fire to every form of delusion and rebellious pride.

Again, the Second Death is a work of the God of love, wherein He displays His holy anger against every sinner, whose heart and life are marked by reigning selfishness, and the utter want of genuine love.

The revealed ground of the sentence of condemnation is given by our Lord himself in these words: "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not unto me." It is the absence of the works and fruits of love which is made the ground of their fearful doom. Thus the excellency of a pure and perfect love is taught and confirmed by the severity of the sentence, for which the absence of that love is the one cause assigned by the Judge himself. It follows that the Judge who pronounces

the sentence is perfect in love, and in love even to those on whom the sentence falls. The Holy One would else be a sharer in the sin, which He is visiting in His creatures with the most solemn and severe condemnation. The second death, therefore, from the very ground on which the sentence of doom is based, implies the highest honour given to love, as the crowning grace, and the image of the Divine perfection; and also the exercise of such love by the Judge himself, even to those against whom He denounces wrath for the crime of a selfish and unloving heart. It may be a deep mystery how the Divine love can possibly reveal itself, where Divine righteousness has to be displayed for ever in a sentence of everlasting shame and punishment. But if righteousness and grace co-exist for ever in the infinite perfections of the Most High, their exercise may co-exist for ever in His dealings even with those whose guilt requires that righteousness should assume the form of irreversible and lasting punishment. Every stroke of the Avenger is a solemn testimony to God's anger against selfishness, and His delight in pure and perfect love.

The Resurrection of Judgment, like the Resurrection of Life, is one main part of the redeeming work of Christ.

The two main issues of judgment, in the sheep and the goats, the righteous and the wicked, however deep and solemn the contrast of reward and punishment, have one main feature common to both, that they follow on a resurrection. And hence the Apostle combines them in one common statement, before he marks the contrast

between "them that are Christ's" and all others. "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." Just as the first death, in every case, comes through the sin of Adam, so the life-restoring resurrection is to come, in every case, through the power and work of the Second Adam, the Lord from heaven. Thus the judgment itself on the lost is based on a present work of redemption, which they share with the saved; and on a victory over death, wrought by Christ, and by the power of His atonement and resurrection. Their bodies are first restored completely from the ruin of the grave, and the dominion of death, so far, is wholly abolished.

What now is implied in this truth, so plainly and fully revealed? The contrast of state, due to the contrast of faith and unbelief, of personal rebellion or repentance, during the time of probation, is to abide and endure. But those results, which flowed directly from the sin of the first Adam, are to be reversed and repealed by the grace of the second Adam, the Lord from heaven. For all mankind there has been a federal ruin, and for all mankind there is to be a federal recovery from that ruin. The opposite results of personal character are to remain and endure; but the common results of the Redeemer's work, who is "the head of every man," will endure also. The lesson of the Law is thus repeated by the Gospel in a deeply mysterious form. The wicked will be punished for his wickedness by the righteous Judge, but his brotherhood with the Judge will be eter-

nally revealed by the resurrection which precedes the judgment. "In Christ shall all be made alive." But in the first death the dissolution of the body, and its corruption, was only the type, the sign, and the parable of a deeper curse on the immortal spirit, when driven out wholly from the presence of Him who is Light and Love. This correspondence can hardly cease, when the dead are raised by the power of Christ. When death and hell are cast into the lake of fire, the soul will no longer remain under the curse of utter vanity. It will be compelled, by the mighty hand of God, to glorify Him even in those fires of penal judgment. To glorify the Creator is the great end for which every creature was made. And thus to glorify Him in any way, however solemn, humbling, and mournful, when compared with the utter vanity, darkness, and corruption of that death which is God's enemy, may be, nay, must be, even to the souls of the lost, a real and infinite gain.

Again, the love of Christ has a depth, as well as a height, that passeth knowledge. Its height will be displayed for ever in the glory bestowed upon the risen saints, whom He promotes to sit with Him on His throne. Its depth has been revealed, once for all, in His own agony and death, when He went down to the deep, to darkness, and the lowest pit, for man's redemption. But is its manifestation to cease, and not rather, like that of the height of His love, to endure for evermore? It is more natural and consistent to believe that the depth, like the breadth, and length, and height, will be eternally revealed. But this can only be by the mani-

festation of love towards the guilty and condemned, whose doom is declared to be "shame and everlasting contempt." To them, Divine love, if displayed at all, must assume its strangest and most mysterious form. But since it has a depth that passes knowledge, how can this be seen but in the perpetual yearnings of a deep and true compassion towards those whom the nature of their sin, and the truth of God's threatenings, has laid under a sentence of irreparable loss, and irreversible punishment? When the pride of spirits, once rebellious, has been crushed under the fire of Divine wrath, and they are conscious that their folly and guilt has lost them a glory which can never be regained, and brought them under a righteous sentence never to be repealed, how may the discovery of the unexhausted grace of the Redeemer, the depth of a love which can stoop infinitely low, to encompass them with Divine compassion, pierce through their conscience, and pervade their whole being, amidst their sense of deepest shame and loss, with an awful and stupendous consolation! Self-destroyed, like Israel, their only help can be in a love which is able to reach even to the lowest gulf of shame and helpless misery. In this way not only the height of the love of Christ to the glorified, but its depth, in wondrous compassion to the lost, may be found to surpass all human or created knowledge.

The Apostle, again, declares of the living God, that "he is the Saviour of all men, specially of them that believe." This name of God will be most fully and completely revealed in the future happiness and glory of

believers alone. But He is also "the Saviour of all men." Can this apply to temporal benefits alone, which will wholly cease, and are to be followed by total, absolute destruction and ruin? Can it be satisfied with conditional benefits, made wholly void through the perverseness of the sinner? How will this agree with our Lord's reasoning on another Divine title, "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?" Such a name, He there teaches, implies no transient, but an enduring relation. Here, too, it would seem that the same law of reasoning must apply. Unbelievers are not saved from judgment, from righteous punishment, from the second death, from shame and everlasting contempt, from everlasting fire. Is there any sense in which they may still be saved, consistently with the inflexible truth of these solemn messages of God? They will be saved from bodily corruption, "for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." They will be saved from the curse of hopeless vanity, from that first death, in which the creature is self-ruined, and God himself is not glorified, but for ever blasphemed. They will be saved from the abyss, unfathomable and unsearchable in its depth and darkness, when "death and hell are cast into the lake of fire." Will they not also be saved from that utter, hopeless misery, where no ray of light or comfort breaks in on the solitude of everlasting despair? Will they not be saved, in a strange, mysterious sense, when the depth of their unchangeable shame and sorrow finds beneath it a still lower depth of Divine compassion, and the creature, in its most forlorn

estate, is shut in by the vision of surpassing and infinite love?

A further light seems to dawn on this mysterious subject, when we trace its connexion with the moral attributes and perfections of the Most High.

Every child of man is related to God under three successive forms of Divine goodness. The first is the simple bounty of the Creator. The second is the equity of the moral Governor of the world. The third is the mercy and compassion of the Saviour and Redeemer. These answer to the outer court, the holy place, and the most holy, of the temple of God. The Lord is good to all, His tender mercies are over all His works. He giveth to all men life and breath, and all things. He is also the God who loveth righteousness, and hateth iniquity. He resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. He is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity. He is also a God of infinite compassion and grace. He reclaims the lost, restores the wanderer, welcomes the returning prodigal, and entreats with tender compassion all those who have erred and gone astray.

The second character of God, as the righteous Governor, is that on which the issues of judgment depend. Mankind are parted into two great classes, according to their moral character, their use or abuse of offered grace in the day of probation and forbearance. "Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth

him not." Personal righteousness, in one class, and personal unrighteousness in the other, is the revealed ground of the eternal contrast and separation; but the righteousness of the just, though real, is wholly the fruit of Divine grace, and because it is grace, which "reigns through righteousness," their salvation is due to God alone.

But this wide contrast between the saved and the lost, in their relation to God's judicial righteousness, does not set aside their common relation to the bountiful Creator of all men, and to the God of boundless compassion and grace towards those who are sunk in guilt and misery. The threefold cord, which links them to the throne of God, cannot be broken. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." The love of the All-wise Creator to all His creatures is displayed in the very fact of their creation. It may be veiled for a time, but cannot be destroyed by the later unfolding of moral evil. And thus His judgments, when most awful, have to be tempered into strange harmony with this earlier revelation of His goodness. "I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made." In like manner, the link between sorrow and misery, wherever found, and however caused, and the Divine compassion, must abide and endure. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" to be the propitiation for their sins. Our Lord is "the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world." When He stooped from His

glory, and became the Son of Man, He became the brother and the head of every man; and the law, "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," was written in His heart. No mysterious depth in the perverseness of evil, and no revealed certainty of inexorable righteousness, when the Judge sits upon the throne of judgment, can ever contract this revealed grace of the Father and of the Son within narrower bounds; so that sinners to whom the Son of God was given, for whom He bore the curse, and over whom there have been the patient broodings of God's infinite compassion, should cease, in their deepest shame, to be encircled evermore with the infinite compassions of Him whose name is Love.

One more remark, in closing, needs to be made, that no voice of the Spirit may seem to be passed over in silence. Our Lord has said of the guilty traitor, "Good were it for that man if he had not been born." The word is *καλὸν*, and not *ἀγαθόν*. The best and highest state, as Greek philosophy saw and taught, is one in which these epithets are combined, the honourable and the good, or happiness united with honour, dignity, and glory. The state of lost souls is one, not of honour, but of deepest shame. In respect of honour, it were far better for them not to have been born. The shame of the creature, in contrast to the glory of the Creator, will be revealed in them for ever. But with regard to the good, as distinct from the honourable, no such declaration is once made. It would even seem to imply that the destructive power of evil, in their case, outweighed

and surpassed the free bounty of their first creation, and all the stupendous riches of redeeming grace. May we not rather believe that their condition will be a mysterious paradox, an eternal contrast, where the *καλὸν* has been reversed into utter shame through the perverseness of evil; but the *ἀγαθὸν* remains, because the love of the Creator, and the grace of the Redeemer, even in the depth as well as the height, are mightier than the mightiest power of the creature for self-destruction and utter ruin?

So also it is written, "He shall have judgment without mercy, that showed no mercy." These words may well describe the stern severity of God's anger, while pride or unmercifulness remains uncrushed in the hardened sinner. But when that prostration of the rebellious will is complete, under a doom solemn and irreversible, then may the rest of the statement be also fulfilled,—"mercy rejoiceth against judgment." The doom itself, by the nature of the sinful spirit, and the truth of the Divine threatening, will be irreversible, and the contrast between the saved and the lost an everlasting separation. And still, out of the depths of their shame there may dawn such a vision of the perfect goodness of the Most High, such a discovery of the wisdom, holiness, and love which have borne with a world of rebels, such strange and vast unfoldings of victorious goodness through the ages to come, as may become a message of real mercy to those who abide for ever under the solemn sentence of the Most High. God shall then be "all in all," when the depths of that fiery

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